

山形石雄

宮城

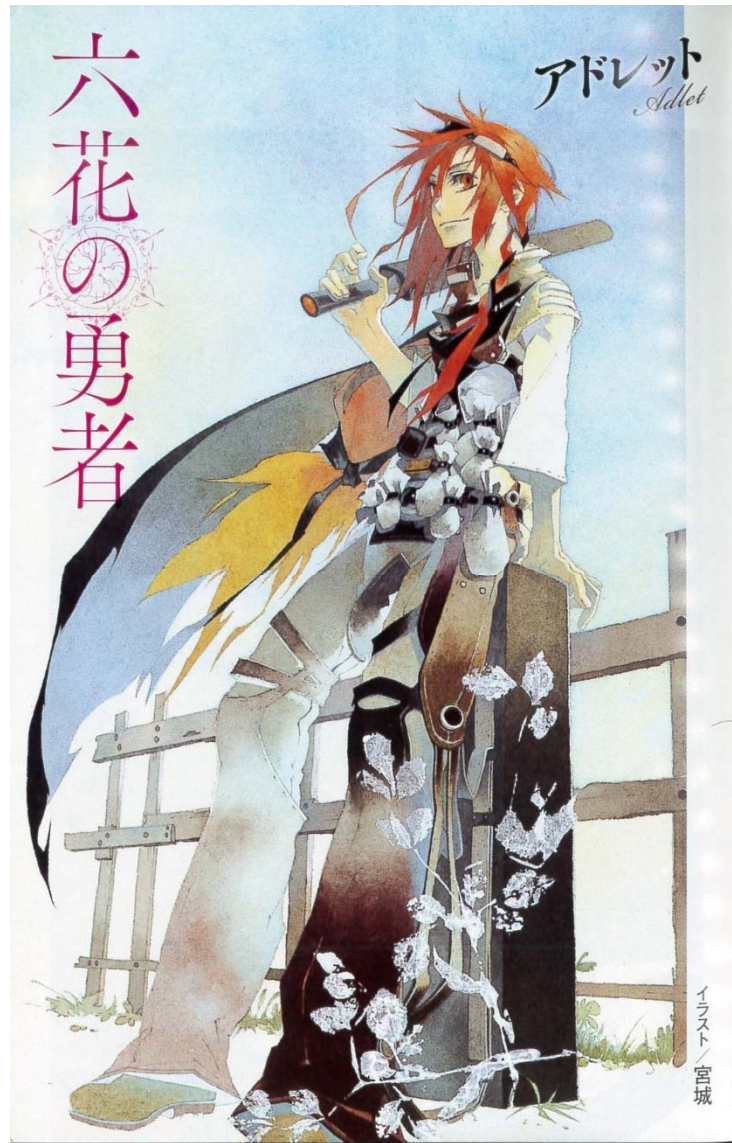
# 六花の勇者



D  
スーパーダッシュ

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**Adlet**

A young boy who calls himself the strongest man in the world. He fights with a mastery of various secret weapons.

## Character Introductions

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**Nashetania**

Though she is the princess of the large kingdom Piena, she is a wild and free girl, full of mischief. She is the Saint of Blades.



## Character Introductions

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**Fremy**

A girl whose cool indifference won't allow others to get close. As the Saint of Gunpowder she uses guns and bullets in battle.

## Character Introductions

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**Goldof**

A young knight completely devoted to Nashetania, he wields a giant spear.

## Character Introductions

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**Chamo**

A proud girl who is called the most powerful warrior of the current age. She is the Saint of Swamps.

## Character Introductions

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**Hans**

A strange man who mimics a cat as he talks. He fences with an unworldly and peculiar skill.



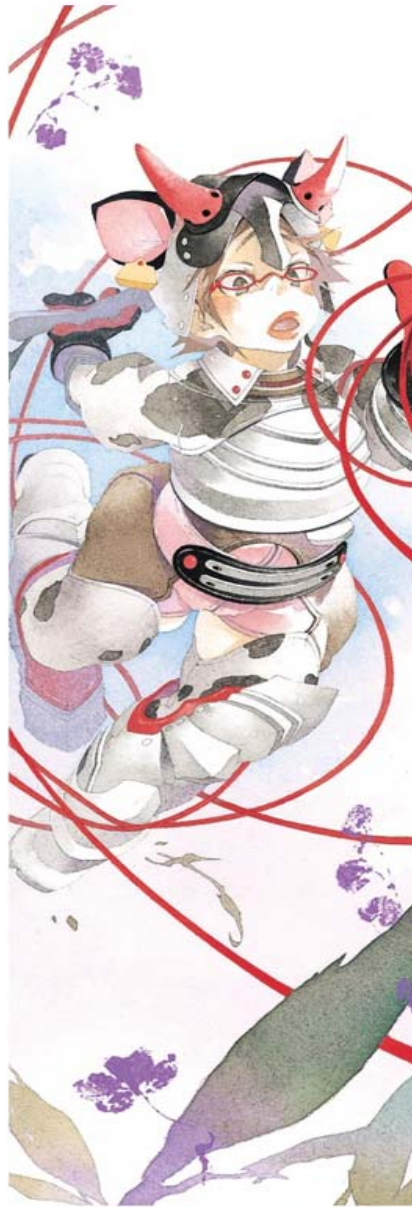
## Character Introductions

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**Mora**

An extremely serious and intellectual woman. She serves as the leader of the Saints and is the Saint of Mountains.



ロロニア  
*Rolonia*

### **Rolonia**

A newly arrived Hero of the Six Flowers who is a timid, but good-natured girl. She is the Saint of Fresh Blood.

### The Commanders



テグネウ  
*Tgurneu*

### Tgurneu

One of the Kyoma commanders. He excels in ingenuity and has set up various traps.

(Pronounced Teguneu)



**Dozzu**

One of the Kyoma commanders. He betrayed the Majin and has gone into hiding.





**Cargikk**

???



*Do you mind if I go and help her?*







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### Prologue

Mud and a flower. Other than those there was nothing else.

In the land of Fallen Tears, where The Saint of the Single Flower had fought the Majin to the death, nothing else existed other than mud and a flower.

#

At the western edge of the Wailing Demon Territory, in the land of the Fallen Tears, a giant fort surrounded where the Majin slept. It was a stronghold that had been designed according to the instructions of Cargikk, one of the Kyoma commanders. It was made up of natural stones piled upon one another and formed two concentric circles. The outer circle had a radius of three kilometers while the inner circle had a radius of 500 meters. Although it had been crudely constructed, it was a stronghold larger and stronger than anything found in the human world.

The area called the Land of the Fallen Tears was the small inner zone surrounded by the defensive wall. It was completely dark red due to the toxins from the Majin's body having permeated deep within the ground, thus dyeing the area that color. There was not a single weed, animal, or insect in the area. There were only sparse boulders scattered about the lifeless land. It was a barren spectacle.

The only things present there were mud and a flower.



"...Adlettt!!"

A hideous mass of mud lay among the dead land. Its size was probably about that of a stable. It made an eerie sound as if squirming in agony, and it was charcoal black in color, with a bit of blood-red mixed in. What looked like red tentacles stretched out from the center of the mud. They were about five meters in length and seemed to be extending out in search of something. But then they returned to the mud as if they had given up.

"...Fremyyy...Roloniaaa..."

There were giant lips in the center of the mud. They appeared, then disappeared, then appeared once more. They were the seductive red of a woman's lips. And they were speaking with a husky female voice.

As it wriggled, the mud called out the names of the Heroes with a voice full of hatred and murderous intent coursing through its words.

"Goldofff....Chamooo....Adlettt...Hanssss...Moraaa...Chamooo...Fremyyy...Nasheta niaaa..."

The Majin. The worst calamity to befall mankind and the progenitor of the Kyoma.

Once every several minutes a strange creature was produced from the mud. They were about the size of kittens, but none of them had the same appearance.

There was a snake whose entire body was covered in countless eyes. There was a creature that had the upper body of a monkey and a lower body of a small winged insect. There was a dog that had a head and a torso but didn't have its legs or its tail. There was a praying mantis that only consisted of the creature's neck. There was even a creature composed of just seven monkey hands, though it no longer seemed to be alive.

The strange creatures that appeared from the mud writhed, gasped for air, and twisted their bodies on the ground. It seemed as if they despaired being born with such repulsive figures.

Then the eerie creatures were immediately grabbed by the tentacles of The Majin. The tentacles strangled the strange creatures, killed them, and then pulled their corpses back into the mud.

Birth then kill, kill then birth. The Majin endlessly repeated these meaningless actions. Again, and again, and again.

No dignity could be felt from the figure. It didn't possess the beauty of wickedness, and for a long time its existence was far from sublime. It was ugly and dirty, and even small.

When Byrne, one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers, had fought with the Majin seven hundred years ago he criticized the Majin's form as being disappointingly scrawny.

And yet a single flower bloomed beside The Majin. It was small enough that it could fit in the palm of a child's hand. It was a light purple flower with six petals. The light purple flower was not stained with the Majin's toxin. It simply nestled up close to it and bloomed.

It is said that the Saint of the Single Flower grew that flower a thousand years ago. However, the flower's true form is not recorded in any work or literature. Whatever kind of power that flower contained, no one knew except for the Saint of the Single Flower herself.

#

Three times mankind had fought with The Majin and beaten it.

The first time was a thousand years ago when the Saint of the Single Flower sealed the Majin in that place.

The second time was seven hundred years ago. Three of the Heroes of the Six Flowers stopped the Demon King Zophrair while the Hero King Fulmer and the master archer Byrne fought with the Majin.

The Majin swung its tentacles and scattered its toxin while the two attacked it. Fulmer wielded his sword within its blanket of toxic air and sliced the chunks of mud into pieces. Byrne fired burning arrows which lit the Majin's body on fire. After about an hour of fighting the Majin released a monstrous scream and ceased to move.

The third battle was three hundred years ago. While over one thousand Kyoma rushed through the Land of Fallen Tears, the second generation of the Heroes of the Six Flowers clashed with the Majin. The Saint of Lightning Melania, supported by Marie the Saint of Blades and the Saint of Time Hayal, activated her jeweled sacred weapon. It was a tool that had been built in over thirty years for the sole purpose of striking the Majin. Several bolts of lightning rained down from the heavens which struck, seared, and burned The Majin, stopping it once again.

It is said that in the case of the Majin's defeat the crests of the Six Flowers would emit a giant light. And at the exact same time all the Kyoma would stop moving then look up to the sky and wail in sadness.

The sorrowful cries of the Kyoma could be heard echoing beyond the borders of the Wailing Demon territory. And the sight of the Kyoma writhing in sadness was enough to make even the Heroes of the Six Flowers, who had been fighting them to the death earlier, feel heartbroken. It was said that even after the surviving Heroes had left the Wailing Demon Territory, the cries of the Kyoma never stopped.

As for the crests that had appeared on the skin of the Heroes of the Six Flowers, stories tell that after the battle the crests would begin to fade. And after about six months they had disappeared entirely.

#

Marie, one of the few surviving Heroes and the Saint of Blades, made the following analysis of the Majin:

*The Majin was the master of the Kyoma. However, the Majin did not issue any kinds of commands to the Kyoma and the Kyoma did not depend on the Majin for instructions.*

*Perhaps the Majin didn't have any intelligence at all. It probably has a lower intelligence than the average animal. The Majin's existence was one where it hated humans and could think of nothing else but destroying them.*

*On the other hand, it was not rare for the Kyoma to possess intelligence. There were even some who had minds greater than the humans'. They were the ones that governed and commanded the other Kyoma.*

*The Kyoma's loyalty to the Majin was absolute. Unlike humans, the Kyoma were largely unable to think for themselves and followed orders without thinking. The Kyoma pledged everything in their devotion to the Majin and lived to grant any kind of wish The Majin had.*

*It is due to that very loyalty that the Kyoma's existence held meaning. And if they were to lose that then the Kyoma would not be able to live.*

The Saint of Blades' analysis was largely accurate. Yet there was one exception.

There was a Kyoma that had its own will and aspirations, and lived for himself and not for the Majin.



His name was Dozzu. He had left the Wailing Demon Territory about two hundred years ago and headed for the human world.

For 200 years he had refined his plans and made preparations to achieve his ambitions before he returned to the Wailing Demon Territory. And at his side was his peerless comrade whom he had raised himself, Nashetania.



Chapter One  
Reunion

### Chapter One: Part One

"I want to hear what everyone thinks," Mora said.

It was 14 days after the Majin had awoken. Adlet and the others who managed to cut their way through Tgurneu's trap were at The Eternal Flower, a safe zone in the Wailing Demon Territory. There they waited for Hans and Mora to recover from their serious injuries.

There were almost no Kyoma around the Eternal Flower. It seemed like the Kyoma were waiting for the group in the forest to the west called the Forest of Severed Fingers. The Forest of Severed Fingers comprised about two-fifths of the vast territory of the Wailing Demon Territory, and its name came from an event a thousand years ago when the Saint of the Single Flower was attacked in the forest and lost a finger on her left hand.

While waiting for Mora and Hans' injuries to heal, the Heroes discussed the possible identity of the seventh, and then they presented the various clues at hand. But even with all of the speculation and debate, in the end they couldn't come up with an answer. They had no clue as to how the impostor's crest had been created.

They then discussed in more detail about the events of the battle in the Illusion Fog Barrier. After Nashetania's true identity had been exposed Adlet had lost consciousness, so he asked the others about what happened after that. Hans, Mora, and Chamo had chased after Nashetania, but as the dawn approached and they managed to exit the barrier Nashetania had disappeared.

Why did Nashetania betray them and to what extent had the Kyoma's influence reached into the human world? The group discussed those topics as well, but they were still unable to come to any conclusion.

Fremy told them all about the inner workings of the Kyoma. Tgurneu's subordinates were called The Dark Specialists. They couldn't enhance their strengths, but each one of them possessed a unique ability which they had been ordered to develop to the fullest.

Those Kyoma specialized in pursuit. Fremy said the Kyoma had gained the power to invade the internal bodies of a Saint and bind their power. The Kyoma also excelled at extorting information out of humans. They developed an extremely superb sense of smell and they received the ability to birth hybrid children with humans.

Even Fremy didn't know all of the abilities the Dark Specialists had. Nevertheless she told the others everything she knew about their abilities and appearances.

They kept on talking about other things after that, but when daybreak came and their topics were exhausted Mora suddenly suggested that she wanted to hear their opinions.

"What's the matter, Mora?" Adlet asked.

"How about we hear who each of us suspects is the seventh?"

"I'm sure I said not to carelessly doubt any one of us."

"I understand that. But even if you say not to suspect anyone, the reality is I still am suspecting someone. Don't you think knowing what is suspicious about ourselves will prevent us from being framed?"

Adlet wasn't in a good mood, but instead Fremy quietly replied, "I don't think that's a bad idea."

"Meow, it doesn't seem like there would be much of a point to it," Hans said.

"Of course until we find solid proof we won't kill anyone. And in the future we'll definitely be able to reference what we discussed here."

"Well...I guess it can't be helped," Adlet said with a shrug.

"I suspect Goldof," Fremy spoke first. "He was a knight serving Nashetania. It's only natural to suspect him."

"Is that so? Well, Chamo suspects you, Fremy," Chamo cut in. "It's obvious. Chamo hasn't forgotten how just a while ago you tried to kill Chamo."

"That is true. Is there anyone else?" Fremy didn't pay any attention to what Chamo had said.



"...Actually, I also suspect Goldof," Mora said. "While it may be true that he served Nashetania, that doesn't mean I think he is the seventh. But I don't feel like he has any intentions on trying to contribute to our victory."

Goldof listened silently to the three of them, but there was no life in his eyes. He just stared blankly at the ground, sitting with his back rounded. He had been that way ever since they'd come to the Wailing Demon Territory.

"Goldof, if you are not the seventh then shouldn't you be trying a lot harder for your companions? Don't you think your words and your actions should be able to convey that you aren't the seventh? Don't you also feel bad about being suspected?" Mora suggested, but her words did not seem to reach Goldof.

Although he heard what she had said, it was as if his mind had been closed off. When Adlet had first met Goldof he hadn't been like that. He was strong, loyal, and sometimes he let his arrogance show, proving that he was indeed a young knight. At least that had been the impression Adlet had gotten from him. However, the person that remained after Nashetania had left was like an entirely different person.

"What do you think, Goldof?" Adlet asked.

But Goldof remained silent. Chamo then raised her hand into the air again.

"Ah, right. Chamo also thinks Rolonia is suspicious."

"What?!" the quiet Rolonia suddenly raised her voice in hysteria. "Wha, wha, why...do you think that?"

"Well, let's see. Chamo doesn't really know what you are thinking. And that's suspicious."

"I...I see....So, sorry. I'll...um...try harder," Rolonia said as her body trembled.

"Ah, but maybe it's Fremy after all. Yeah, it's Fremy."

Mora sighed at Chamo's fickleness.

"What do you think Hans?"

After being asked, Hans placed a hand on his chin and thought about it for a moment.

"Me...I suspect Adlet and Chamo, meow." Everyone except for Goldof stared at Hans in shock. "I'm not thinking about who is suspicious. I think it's more important to consider who would be the most dangerous as the seventh. Adlet was the most dangerous out of everyone when we thought he was the seventh. Next would be Chamo. That's why I suspect the two of them."

*I also think the same way, Adlet thought with a bit of admiration.*

"So, what do you think, Rolonia, meow?" Hans asked.

Rolonia looked around as if it was difficult for her to say what was on her mind.

"You should speak honestly. Didn't Chamo just say it's hard to know what you're thinking?"

Urged by Fremy singling her out, Rolonia quietly said, "I suspect...Goldof-san. For the same reason....as Mora-san."

And with that, three out of five suspected Goldof. For him, whether he was a genuine Hero of the Six Flowers or the seventh, he wasn't in a good predicament. Nevertheless Goldof showed absolutely no signs that he was affected by the news.

"What do you think, Adlet?"

"I'm not going to say anything since I am the leader. If I were to say who I suspected, it would damage our trust," Adlet said decisively.

"Well, that may be better for you, meow."

Everyone's gazes pointed to the last person, Goldof. He lifted up his head and looked around himself with blank eyes.

"Goldof, what are you thinking? Have you been listening up till now, meow?"

After a slight pause Goldof replied, "...I've been listening."

"Then, who do you suspect, meow?"

"...No one."

His words confused everyone. *Should we regard that as a confession that he is the seventh?*

"Whoever is the seventh...I don't care. What difference does it make?"

"Goldof. It's that kind of attitude that makes Rolonia and myself suspect you."  
Mora then suddenly grew angry. "Why won't you consider who the seventh is? Why won't you talk about what you know about Nashetania? Do you really intend to protect this world?"

"...protect the world?" For just a moment Goldof's spirit returned to his eyes. He stared down at his palm and then made a fist. "That's right, Mora. I remember. I will protect the world. I have to protect it. It's for that reason that I..."

Goldof's hand started to shake and then it started to make a strange sound. Since he was balling his fist with an extreme amount of strength the bones in his hand grated against each other.

"That's right Goldof. You are a person who will protect the world. Have you come back to your senses?"

Mora placed her hand on Goldof's fingers. However, Goldof coldly shook it off. Then he hung his head again and wouldn't reply no matter what his companions said.

"There really was no point in us talking."

"It seems that way. Sorry."

"That's enough of this conversation. More importantly I'm interested in Tgurneu, meow."

"That's right. Ahead of us is the forest of Severed Fingers. Judging from the looks of it, Tgurneu is there waiting to ambush us."

Even after the subject had moved on to another topic, Adlet still continued to stare at Goldof. '*To protect the world.*' For some reason Adlet didn't feel any confidence from Goldof's words.

Though he hadn't said anything, in reality Adlet also suspected Goldof. And that was because Goldof didn't seem like one of their companions. Though they had all been seized by paranoia, little by little a sense of solidarity had formed among the group.

Adlet also acknowledged Hans' knowledge and his practical strength. And despite what he'd said earlier, Adlet knew that Hans really trusted him. Chamo was difficult to handle, but unexpectedly he was starting to think there were parts of her that were gentle and cute. Mora had betrayed them once, but her desire to protect her family and her companions was genuine. And for trusting Adlet from the bottom of her heart, he was grateful to Rolonia and her assistance. As for Fremy, though he had only disagreed with her, it didn't change the fact that she was his most precious companion.

Yet Goldof was different. Adlet was unable to communicate with him. There was no part of him that Adlet understood and sometimes Goldof seemed like a mysterious monster.

Adlet still didn't know the truth about the boy called Goldof Aurora.

#

It was the fifteenth day after The Majin had reawakened. Hans' and Mora's injuries had healed and Mora was even able to repair her broken iron gauntlets. So the seven again resumed their journey. They advanced towards the vast forest in the middle of the night with the help of Fremy's sniping and Chamo's Jyuma taking out the Kyoma patrolling the Eternal Flower.



The group traveled with their bodies low to the ground, each one of them wrapped in black cloaks that Adlet had provided. And blending into the night they headed west.

The group wasn't thinking about killing Tgurneu, nor were they thinking about discovering the identity of the seventh. They were just running and hiding as if their lives depended on it.

"Mora, are there any enemies behind us?" Adlet asked from the head of the group.

"None," Mora responded at the tail end of the party. She had been walking backwards with her fists ready to attack. And with Hans on the lookout to the right and Fremy watching their left, the seven of them quietly advanced.

At that moment a single mouse crept towards the group's feet. Chamo picked it up and brought it to her ear.

"The enemy has made a wall about 300 meters ahead. And there are a lot of Kyoma in front of it."

"I see...Fremy. What are the features of that wall?"

"It's close to 30 kilometers from north to south so I think it is impossible to avoid it. Mora would be able to punch through it with her strength. However, a loud alarm was set up to go off if we get near it."

"Do you know what type of alarm it is?"

"It's a combination of string and wood blocks. If our feet trip the string wire, the wood fragments will rattle loudly."

"Meow, it's like that huh? I could get past it easily."

Adlet brought his hand to his chin and thought for a moment. Then he gathered everyone and explained his strategy.

"First we'll retreat about one kilometer. After that Fremy will set up some bombs on the ground. She'll make them explode in one hour. Until then we will head north."

"So it's a diversion," Mora said and Adlet nodded.

"When the explosions go off the Kyoma will probably gather there. Then Chamo will have her Jyuma attack the wall. This will also be a diversion. We will then head to a southern section of the wall. Fremy will get rid of the remaining lookouts with her rifle. Hans and I will break the alarm. Then Mora will break down the gate as quietly as possible."

"Understood."

"Do your best not to be discovered...not by the Kyoma or by Tgurneu."

The seven then began to move. They moved quietly as Fremy's bombs and Chamo's Jyuma threw the Kyoma into confusion. Fremy shot at the Kyoma in an area where the Kyoma were scarce, creating an opening for Adlet, Hans, and Mora to break through the wall. Then before the remaining Kyoma on the lookout could return, everyone rushed to that break in the wall and left for the west.

"That went well Ad-kun," Rolonia said, walking at Adlet's side.

"This place..." Adlet suddenly peeked through the opening in the canopy of tree branches overhead and looked up at the sky. The stars had already faded and slowly the sky was starting to grow brighter.

"Perhaps Tgurneu lost track of us. If he knew about our conduct he would have sent more Kyoma to ambush us."

"That...that's right."

"For now let's continue to run. Until we get out of this forest, until we pass the valley, until we finally manage to reach the Land of Fallen Tears, we'll run with all our energy away from Tgurneu," Adlet said and Rolonia nodded. And it seemed that the same went without saying for Hans, Chamo, Fremy and the others.

They would not fight with Tgurneu. They couldn't even figure out where he was. So they could only continue to run and head straight for the Land of Fallen Tears.

"Have you noticed, Adlet?" Fremy suddenly asked him.

"What's the matter?"

"There are a few battles happening behind us. But since I can only faintly hear it I don't know who is fighting."

Adlet listened carefully as he walked. He could hear the stirring trees, his companions' footsteps, and the faint shouts of Kyoma.

"Someone is definitely fighting. But who?"

"Even though it will take a while, will you let Chamo go and see?" Chamo asked, but Adlet shook his head.

"I'm interested, but our time is more precious than that knowledge. Let's leave it alone and keep moving."

Fremy and Chamo both nodded and the seven continued on to the west. Turning to look behind them they could no longer see the wall.

#

An hour had passed since Adlet and the others had passed the wall and a single Kyoma was staring at the hole they had made.

"Hmm, they got through this too? I don't know what to do with them," said a Kyoma with the body of a yeti and the head of a crow. In its hand it was holding a single large fig fruit. The yeti Kyoma...Tgurneu sighed. "It seems like they are set on running away from me."

There was a large amount of Kyoma in the vicinity, all shouting themselves hoarse. The more intelligent Kyoma that could speak were ordering the lower Kyoma to quickly find the Six Flowers.

"What do you think, Number 18?"

There was a snake Kyoma beside Tgurneu. It was thin enough to be gripped in one hand, but its body was over ten meters long. And what appeared to be two thin arms, which looked like paper strings, were growing out of its body about 50 centimeters from its head.

"They are unbelievably cowardly. They aren't worth fearing," the Kyoma said in ridicule.



Among Tgurneu's subordinates there were special Kyoma called the Dark Specialists. The snake Kyoma was the 18th. It and the others had evolved according to Tgurneu's commands, each possessing several unique abilities.

"You're the one who does not need to be feared," Tgurneu said and lightly kicked Number 18. "If you were in their position, what would you do? What would you prioritize and how would you act?"

"...If I were them I would think that exposing the seventh's identity was most important, but..." Number 18 said and Tgurneu sighed once again.

"Of the options available to them that would be the worst. In their current situation they have no way of finding out who the seventh is. And they shouldn't be able to find any clues that could lead them to the seventh. In that kind of situation what would you do?"

"Well...."

"I would wait until the seventh's mistakes were exposed. That's what I would do if I were in their position. Do you have any other ideas?"

"Instead of that they might prioritize killing you, Master Tgurneu."

"That's a mediocre idea. Sure, if they were to kill me the Heroes of the Six Flowers would draw close to a large victory. But in exchange they would lose something precious. Don't you understand anything?"

"Uh...I..."

Without waiting for Number 18's reply, Tgurneu continued talking. "It's time. There are no more than 14 days until the Majin's resurrection. If the Heroes are unable to reach the Land of Fallen Tears by that time then victory will be ours. If the Heroes come to take me out I will do everything in my power to stall them. If they are unable to kill me then the only thing they will succeed in doing is wasting a lot of time."

"..."

"So do you understand now what their best course of action is? Running away from me. They will ignore me and head straight for the Land of Fallen Tears. And as long as we don't know their whereabouts, even with my power our options are limited."

Tgurneu's beak moved and somehow it seemed like he was smiling.

"Aren't you going to kill me, Adlet? It seems I was mistaken about your level of determination after all."

"...I have a suggestion, Master Tgurneu. How about ordering the seventh to tell us the Flowers' location?"

Tgurneu stepped on Number 18's body. "If you say another stupid thing I will crush you."

The snake Kyoma lowered its head and placed its paper-like thin arms on the ground in apology.

"Well, I guess it's alright. Let's take it easy. Searching for them is good, but so is luring them out. There are many ways for us to play."

#

For two days after leaving The Eternal Flower Adlet and the others ran through the Forest of Severed Fingers. The journey was a complete team effort. Fremy directed them through the complicated forest. Chamo's Jyuma searched the area for enemies and looked for spots where the Kyoma were scarce. Mora threw the Kyoma into confusion with her power of Mountain Echoes, and both Adlet and Hans contributed their knowledge and predicted the enemies' behavior. When they encountered an unlucky Kyoma they eliminated it as quickly as they could before it could convey the group's location to Tgurneu.

In order to completely kill a Kyoma one had to find its core and destroy it. If left alone the Kyoma would come back to life several years later.

But at the moment their time was limited. So ignoring the corpses, Adlet and the others continued onward.

The Forest of Severed Fingers was vast. No matter how many Kyoma were there, they couldn't watch the entire area. So for two days Adlet and the others hadn't been discovered by Tgurneu.

As the eastern sky was tinged with red, it signified that dawn was on the horizon. After a long journey Adlet and the others were finally close to the exit of the forest.

"...There are no Kyoma beyond the forest. So rest assured, I think it is safe to continue," Fremy said after having returned from checking the area ahead.

"There are no Kyoma behind us either. However, Chamo wonders if we were able to completely get away," Chamo added.

"Tgurneu should think that we are more to the north, meow. So if we continue this way, I at least think we'll be fine," Hans responded.

"Well that means we've broken through the first barrier," Adlet confirmed.

In response Adlet and the others smiled and then went around shaking each other's hands. Though they extended their hand to Fremy, she kept her arms crossed and looked away, uncooperative.

Adlet however persistently continued to offer his hand and before long she reluctantly lightly gripped just one of his fingers.

After that Rolonia and Mora sought a handshake from Fremy. And with a disgusted look on her face, Fremy accepted their shakes. Hans also stuck out his hand, but Fremy refused.

"Anyway, the seventh is yet again not doing anything," Fremy said.

As the companions moved through the forest they were always watching one another. Adlet wondered if the seventh would attack their companions under the cover of night, purposefully taking actions that would allow them to be found by the enemy, or secretly having contact with Tgurneu. However, no one did anything suspicious.

"There's no need to hurry. The seventh will definitely do something soon. We just need to be careful not to overlook whatever action they take."

"...I think that's alright, but..." Adlet's eyes suddenly took notice of Goldof at the edge of the circle. He still hadn't shaken Goldof's hand. But when Adlet offered his hand, Goldof unexpectedly accepted the handshake.

"You did a lot for us too. Let's continue to do our best," Adlet said, but Goldof's eyes never met Adlet's, nor did he respond.



While they moved through the forest, Adlet had been watching Goldof especially carefully. Goldof had loyally followed Adlet's commands and didn't show any suspicious behavior at all. But what Goldof was thinking still remained a mystery. His attitude was like a husk, and Adlet couldn't tell by looking at him whether it was an act or whether it was his true feelings.

"It's about time we go, Adlet. The valley will be next after we get out of the forest. Stay on your guard."

"Ah, yeah, got it." In response to Fremy, Adlet started to walk. However, Goldof was still on his mind. *I wonder what he's thinking about. What is Nashetania to him now?* Without getting an answer, they made their way out of the forest and then continued west.

#

Adlet didn't know about the unimaginable event already underway in a corner of the Forest of Severed Fingers. At about the same time that Adlet and the others had gotten out of the forest, Tgurneu was lying down on a hammock. A single book and a giant fig were on his chest. And above him an eagle Kyoma descended from the sky.

"Master Tgurneu. I have news to report."

"The Dark Specialists that had been pursuing the Six Flowers were attacked and killed by Chamo's Jyuma. You've lost all traces of the Six Flowers and their scent,

which means we now have no clues about their current situation. Am I wrong?" Tgurneu responded without opening his eyes. His voice contained a slight bit of annoyance.

"Ye...yes."

Tgurneu took out a map from under his hammock and stared at it.

"Well then, where have you gone? Are you still in the northern forest or have you already managed to reach the valley?" He said to himself before going quiet in thought.

"Master Tgurneu. Your orders..."

"They have already exited the forest. Leave half of our forces in the forest and have the other half head to the valley. We shall make the valley our next playground. Catch them when they cross the valley. Flank them and attack them from the side."

"As you command."

The very moment the eagle Kyoma was about to fly off, Tgurneu reached out and grabbed its leg.

"Master Tgurneu, what is it?"

For a while Tgurneu did not answer and simply looked around. Without the expression on the face of his crow head changing, no one could read what he was truly feeling.

"I take back what I just said. Call back the forces to my location."

"Wh....Why is that?"

"The enemy."

Immediately the eagle Kyoma took to the skies. Tgurneu lowered himself from his hammock and took a bite out of the fig fruit. Then he picked up a stick he'd placed on the ground and gripped it tightly.

The unsettling sound of someone rushing towards him echoed through the air.

Koyori is paper that is spun into string.

### Chapter One: Part Two

The Heroes probably had walked for about five hours after getting out of the forest, as the sun was already rising. The seven continued to head straight to the west, not once being attacked by the Kyoma as they crossed about two-fifths of the Wailing Demon Territory.

But as they walked across a plain the Heroes finally encountered their next obstacle.

"Meoww! It's huge, meow! This is the first time I've seen something this incredible." For some reason, the moment Hans looked at it he let out a happy shout.

But Adlet couldn't blame him. He was also left speechless in awe of the giant sight in front of them. Mora, Rolonia, and Chamo's eyes also widened in amazement.

There was a valley standing in their way, perhaps close to a hundred meters deep and about fifty meters wide at its narrowest point. The valley stretched from the south straight to the north, and even though they looked in both directions it was impossible to see where it began or ended.

The cliff sides had been cut perpendicularly and were covered in smooth stone without any places to grip on. At the bottom of the valley there was a boiling river with thick steam rising up from it. The heat from the steam even reached where

Adlet and the others stood, which made their location about five degrees hotter than it was in the middle of the forest.

Adlet had never seen a valley that gigantic in his entire life. Three days ago at the Eternal Flower they heard about the valley from Fremy. However, the valley's size far surpassed Adlet's imagination.

"It's unbelievable. Was all of this dug out by the Kyoma?" Rolonia asked at Adlet's side.

"The Kyoma have continued to prepare for the battle with the Six Flowers for three hundred years. Excavating a valley like this was no trouble at all."

Everyone was facing the giant valley. It was a place where nothing had ever lived, not when the Saint of the Single Flower had fought with the Majin nor when the previous Six Flowers had defeated The Majin. It was called Cargikk's canyon. Cargikk, one of the Kyoma commanders, had made it and it was the world's largest moat.

According to Fremy the valley split the Wailing Demon Territory into two halves. In order to reach the Land of Fallen Tears they would have to cross the valley.

For a while, the sight of the magnificent valley captivated the group. But soon Mora made a sullen face and asked, "How are we going to get across this valley? Tgurneu will soon notice that we have gotten out of the forest. Then Kyoma will flood this area and we'll be surrounded."



"We'll find a way to cross this valley soon. There's nothing to worry about," Adlet said and then took out a rope from the iron box strapped onto his back. Mora held onto one end of the rope as Adlet began to rappel down the cliff.

About seventy meters down, the heat rising into the air made it so that he couldn't breathe. Unable to take it anymore, Adlet scaled back up the rope and returned to the top of the cliff.

"It's no use, Adlet. Getting across will not be easy, even with the power of a Saint," Fremy said coldly.

"Is there no bridge, Fremy?"

"There is. There is one on both the northern and southern tips. But I think it would be impossible to get to them. Cargikk's followers are waiting to ambush us and are planning to wipe us out as soon as it seems like we could get across."

"Is there nothing else, Fremy? No secret path or something? Is there a way we can safely cross the valley without using the bridges?" Chamo asked.

"There was probably no reason to make something like that since the Kyoma usually use the bridges to cross the valley."

"That's also true, but..."Chamo crossed her arms and tilted her head to the side. The rest of the Heroes were similarly thinking of a way to cross the valley. However, no one seemed to be able to come up with a good idea.

"Your whip won't reach the other side, right Rolonia?" Adlet asked.

Rolonia regretfully nodded. Rolonia had the ability to freely manipulate the movements of her whip which had been imbued with her own blood. But even if she used that ability, it seemed like she wouldn't be able to extend the whip across as a bridge. Her whip was no more than thirty meters long. And even if they added Adlet's rope to the whip's length it still would not be able to reach the opposing cliff.

"Can any of your pets fly, Chamo?" Hans asked.

"If Chamo had pets like that then Chamo wouldn't be worried. Cat-san, you're not making fun of me, are you?" Chamo replied unpleasantly.

"If Asley were here....she could create a bridge of ice for us to cross," Mora said in a regrettable tone.

Asley had been the Saint of Ice and a Six Flower Candidate. But she had lost her life to Fremy, the Six Flower Killer.

"The Saint of Ice was the very first person I killed exactly so that the Heroes would not be able to get across the valley. I received the order from Tgurneu himself," Fremy said coldly.

After that the seven continued to discuss for a while. But the only thing they were able to figure out was that they would not be able to cross the valley with their current abilities.

The Kyoma created a moat in order to prevent their enemies from advancing. Attacking from the front was a simple idea. However, such a direct frontal assault would have been the most troublesome for the enemy. Frontal assaults were effective precisely because of how direct they were. *Perhaps this Cargikk is a more formidable enemy than Tgurneu*, Adlet thought.

"Well, for now there's no use in talking amongst ourselves. Let's divide into three groups and search for a way to cross the valley. It doesn't matter how particular the plan is. Find something. Hans and Mora, head north. Rolonia, Goldof, and I will go south. Chamo and Fremy will remain here to keep an eye out for enemies coming from the rear."

"It looks like this will be more troublesome than I thought." Mora said.

Adlet made an expression pretending nothing was wrong and replied. "It's going to be easy for us to take out this Cargikk guy, but if the strongest man in the world weren't here, you would all end up stuck here out of luck."

"Hey, it's been a long time since you said you were the world's strongest, meow," Hans said with a wry smile.

"That's because the fact that I'm the world's strongest is common knowledge. I don't need to go so far as to say it all the time."

"No one else thinks that other than you, Adlet," Chamo said in an annoyed tone.

"I...I believe that. I believe Ad-kun is the world's strongest," Rolonia said. Adlet wondered if she was being careful not to make him angry.

"I also believe that. Adlet might truly be the world's strongest, in a sense." Mora added.

"Not just in a sense. I *am* the world's strongest," Adlet retorted.

Fremy coldly replied, "You say you are the world's strongest whenever you feel anxious."

She had guessed exactly right, and without thinking, Adlet hesitated.

"Meowhi, aren't you in love with his helplessness?"

"No, I'm not," Fremy replied.

"Umeowmeowmeow. Then what do you love about this fool?"

"...Everything about you is annoying."

Mora forced her way between the two of them.

"We have no time for this. For now let's look for a way to cross the valley. Let's go Hans," Mora said and then pulled Hans' arm, leading him north.

Adlet took Rolonia and Goldof and started to head south. But then Fremy shouted to Rolonia.

"Rolonia."

"Ye, yes? What is it?" Rolonia was startled by being called so suddenly. Fremy drew her face close to Rolonia's cheek and whispered something. Rolonia nodded and then ran over to where Adlet was standing.

"What did she say to you?" Adlet asked as they ran. But for some reason Rolonia hesitated.

"Uh, umm...she told me to keep you safe and protected."

Adlet turned to look behind him and he saw Fremy staring his way. Embarrassed, Adlet turned around and continued to run south.

"Fremy-san is a nice person, don't you think?" Rolonia said and Adlet nodded his agreement.

Adlet felt that a little while ago Fremy and Rolonia had started to develop a good relationship. But he wondered if it was Rolonia who had gotten used to Fremy or the other way around.

#

At around the same time there were about fifty Kyoma twenty kilometers southeast from the Heroes' location.

They were at the edge of the Forest of Severed Fingers. The ground was barren and only covered with rugged rocks. Hot air surged beneath the ground and spewed out of several geysers in the area. The Kyoma called the area the Lava Belt because of the fact that several dozen meters below the surface, there was an underground water current heated by magma.



Among the fifty Kyoma that assembled there was an amphibian Kyoma. It had a gigantic body, a large mouth, and a skin covered in stones. Sometimes a strange smelling steam also rose up from its body.

There was also a monkey Kyoma. It was about the size of a human, but its body was extremely thin. It also had a continuously rippling body hair.

And then there was an adorable Kyoma seated at the center of them all. Its body was small and it had a strange appearance with the legs of what looked like a dog's and a squirrel's.

"The preparations have been completed, Nashetania," the adorable Kyoma said quietly. His name was Dozzu, the traitor who had revolted against The Majin and left the Wailing Demon Territory. He was also one of the three Kyoma commanders.

"Our fate shall be decided here today. Whatever results await us, we shall continue to fight without giving up." Dozzu's voice was small and couldn't reach anyone except for the girl sitting beside him, Nashetania.

"Are you worried about me, Dozzu?" Nashetania smiled. "Relax. I'm not scared of anything. It's clear that we will be victorious in this battle."

"...Nashetania."

"We have Goldof, so there's nothing to fear."

Dozzu quietly nodded.

"For our ambitions we shall fight."

"For the future of humans and Kyoma."

"And for our fallen brethren," Nashetania said and then stood up and wiped off the dirt from her behind.

"Well then everyone. Let's begin. Eliminate Chamo Rosso."

With those words their plan was underway as Nashetania stared at the Kyoma surrounding her with a smile.

#

About ten minutes had passed.

"...Hey, Ad-kun, Goldof-san," Rolonia called out to Adlet and Goldof who were looking down the cliff.

"Did you find something?" Adlet asked. There was urgency in his voice. No matter how many times he had looked down the cliff, he wasn't able to find any clues.

"No, I haven't found anything, but...isn't something strange about this?"

"What?"

"Why aren't there any Kyoma?"

After hearing that, Adlet looked around. It was about time that even Tgurneu would be aware the Heroes had gotten out of the forest. And even if he weren't aware he would have at least dispatched scouts to patrol the valley. For them to not have encountered any of the patrols even once was definitely unusual.

Adlet took out the firecracker that Fremy had given him from one of his pouches. If anything strange happened Fremy would remotely break the firecracker, signaling Adlet and the others.

"Fremy and Hans haven't encountered any Kyoma either, right?"

"That's strange too, but...what's that?" Rolonia quickly pointed to the sky. There was a giant moth Kyoma flying from the center of the Wailing Demon Territory. It didn't seem like it was watching the three of them. It was just flying southeast as fast as it could.

"There was a Kyoma flying in that same direction earlier too."

"...That's odd."

Adlet craned his neck to the side as he looked southeast. He could guess that Kyoma were gathering there, but he couldn't understand why. Tgurneu had already predicted that the Six Flowers were heading towards the valley. So if he ignored that information then there was probably another reason why the Kyoma were being gathered in an unrelated location.

At that moment, Goldof, in a large but slow motion, turned southeast and then started to walk away.

"What's the matter, Goldof-san?" Rolonia called to him, but Goldof didn't stop.

At first he had been moving slowly, but progressively he picked up his speed and began to distance himself from Adlet and Rolonia.

Adlet rushed after him and grabbed his shoulder. Something about him seemed strange.

"Yo, don't act on your own. At the moment you have no business over there."

Then as soon as Adlet felt Goldof grab his wrist, his body was flipped through the air. Before he could know what had happened, Adlet's back crashed into the ground and he was staring up to blue sky.

"Ad-kun?!"

Only after Rolonia had shouted did he realize that he had been thrown.

"What the hell are you doing Goldof?!"

Adlet brushed aside Goldof's hand and rolled back to his feet.

"...The princess is in danger."

"What happened? What's up with the princess...with Nashetania?"

Goldof didn't respond and just continued to quickly walk southeast.

"Wait, Goldof. Explain. What happened to Nashetania?"

"The princess is in trouble. I am going to help her."

"What are you thinking? Nashetania is the enemy."

Adlet circled around in front of Goldof. The next instant Adlet had a fist thrust into his stomach as all of the air had left his lungs. The energy escaped his legs as he fell down to his knees.

"Goldof-san?! What are you doing?!" Rolonia shouted as she rushed over to Adlet.

Goldof then turned around and said to the two of them, "Adlet, Rolonia. I am going to help the princess."

"Why all of a sudden?" Rolonia asked in place of Adlet, who couldn't speak at the moment.

"Listen up and listen well. Do not get in my way. I am going to help the princess."

Ever since they had come to the Wailing Demon Territory, Goldof had been like a corpse. But now a light had returned to his eyes. There was a fire glimmering within his dark gaze.

"I will go alone. Do not follow me."

"Please wait a moment, Goldof-san! What happened?!" Rolonia shouted.

"Circumstances have changed. If you interfere, I will not let you live."

"Le...let us live?" Rolonia said, scared.

Then Adlet noticed something unusual. Goldof was crying. He'd been crying silently ever since he'd shifted his focus onto the Kyoma that were heading southeast.

When Adlet stood up, Goldof had already turned around and run away. And Adlet and Rolonia could do nothing else but watch him run off.

#

About thirty minutes after the remaining Six Heroes were running across the plains chasing after Goldof.

"What's the meaning of this?" Fremy asked.

After hearing the situation from Adlet and Rolonia, their companions all showed faces of confusion. Adlet didn't understand it either.

"You don't think perhaps he really did go mad?" Hans asked.



Frankly, Adlet thought that it was probably the biggest possibility as of then. Goldof's behavior didn't make any sense.

Adlet understood that Goldof missed Nashetania. And it was probably a natural feeling for him to want to bring Nashetania, who was on the side of the Kyoma, over to the Flowers' side. Perhaps that's what he meant when he said he would go to help her. But Adlet had no idea why Goldof was heading off to help her now.

Eventually Adlet and the others discovered three Kyoma corpses in front of the road before them. Adlet drew closer and inspected their injuries.

"Did Goldof kill them?" Mora asked.

As far as Adlet could tell, that was probably the case. All three of the Kyoma had been taken out by a massively sharp strike. What appeared strange was that after the three had been killed, their stomachs had been sliced open.

"He thrust his hand into their stomachs and thoroughly tried searching for something. What are you doing, Goldof?"

"I wonder if he's really trying to save Nashetania," Fremy said. "...Ripping open Kyoma stomachs will help Nashetania? How does that make sense?"

The possibility that Goldof had become completely insane increased even further.

After finishing their inspection of the corpses, Adlet and the others continued after Goldof.

"Is there anything ahead?" Mora asked as they ran.

"If we keep going straight a little bit we will enter the forest again. The lava belt is before that. Magma flows beneath the ground and there are geysers spewing everywhere. It's a dangerous place."

"That bastard...why does he have to do things in a place like that?" Adlet muttered and at the same time Fremy stopped. The other companions who were following her also came to a stop.

"What's wrong, Fremy?"

The moment Adlet looked into her eyes Adlet understood what Fremy wanted to say.

"...We should not follow after Goldof."

"Fremy?"

"It is safe to say that the Kyoma are trying to gather at the lava belt and Goldof is trying to draw all of us there. I don't know what kind of trap Tgurneu and

Nashetania are laying out for us, but if we continue like this it will be an act of suicide."

"Are you saying Goldof is the seventh?"

"That hasn't been determined yet. But he is extremely suspicious."

"Bu...but...Fremy-san," Rolonia timidly said back to Fremy. "Goldof-san might have fallen into some kind of trap. Nashetania-san could be deceiving him and luring him somewhere..."

"What do you mean?"

"Doesn't Goldof-san love Nashetania-san? If he heard that Nashetania-san was in danger I think he would end up going to help her. Maybe the enemy lied to Goldof-san and is trying to trick him into going to the lava belt."

"That doesn't seem right. How would Nashetania deceive Goldof and trick him into going anywhere? Did either you or Adlet see or hear anything?"

"Yeah...umm..."

Fremy's rebuttal was completely right. Chamo then turned to the silent Rolonia.

"What? Didn't you say earlier that you suspected Goldof? Why are you defending him?"

"Ah...ahumm...about that..."

Having been silently thinking as Rolonia and Chamo spoke, Fremy then said, "You've got the right idea, Chamo. From what you've pointed out I can see another possibility. Rolonia tricked Goldof and made him head to the Lava Belt. Then she'd make us follow after him and would try to lead us to the lava belt as well. That is not an impossibility."

Though Rolonia was upset, she wasn't able to get any words to come out of her mouth and ended up just opening and closing it over and over.

"Enough with this unfounded speculation. We need to hurry and come up with a solution for what to do about Goldof. Adlet, what should we do?" Mora asked.

But Adlet was at a loss. The enemy was without a doubt waiting for them up ahead and Goldof was indeed very suspicious. Unsure of what to do, Adlet looked over to Hans, angling for him to offer some advice. But Hans just shook his head.

"The decision is yours, meow. A guy who can't make decisions is not a leader."

*That's right.* Adlet was embarrassed that he tried to rely on Hans.

"Honestly, I am suspicious of Goldof too. And I don't think it's an outrageous proposition...to abandon him like this. But..." Adlet stopped, then for a while he worried over how to continue. "I looked into Goldof's eyes. Those weren't eyes that were capable of deceit. Goldof is seriously trying to save Nashetania. That is certain. At the very least it doesn't seem like he is deceiving us."

Rolonia nodded to Adlet's words.

"So?"

"I still think there is a possibility that Goldof is not the seventh. And as long as that possibility remains we cannot abandon him. If we abandon helping and protecting our fellow companions then we're done for."

Fremy looked at Adlet with a cold stare full of anger. "...That's fine. Let's suppose that Goldof is not the seventh. And let's assume that Goldof is trying to go and help Nashetania. That doesn't change the fact that Nashetania is the enemy. And if Goldof went to go help her then he is not our companion. He is just a traitor. So why should we go and help a traitor?"

"He hasn't betrayed us. He is in love with Nashetania. And someone who wants to protect the person they love is not a traitor."

"...Seriously, you're going to go and help Goldof?"

Adlet nodded and in a rage Fremy grabbed him by the collar. "Stop screwing around!"

"Fr, Fremy-san..." Rolonia stammered.

"You are far too soft! Whether Goldof is the seventh, a traitor, or has completely gone insane doesn't matter! Why should we venture into such a dangerous place in order to help him?!"

"Meow. You're shouting, Fremy," Hans said, trying to stop her. But even his warning did not reach her ears.

"I'm not abandoning our companion. That is my decision. And I don't plan on changing it," Adlet said and he tore Fremy's hand off of him.

"I don't get you."

"...Fremy-san. I think Ad-kun is correct," Rolonia interjected.

"Why?"

"I can't help but feel uneasy. I don't know what kind of trap we're involved in. And I don't know when I'll be suspected of being the seventh. We're going to have to fight under these circumstances in the future too."

"So?"

"But I know that Ad-kun would never abandon me. He will believe in me until the very end. It is thanks to that sense of relief that I am barely able to fight. It's because Ad-kun would never think to betray me that I can fight. But it's not only me. I think everyone here feels the same way."

The Heroes fell silent.

"Fremy, stop this. I understand how you feel...but let's trust Adlet."

"We decided to entrust things to him. Now whatever he says it can't be helped, meow." Hans said and then he smiled and began to walk.

Fremy hung her head and her shoulders dropped as she stared at the ground.

"Adlet, I..." Whatever Fremy was about to say, she stopped herself before it came out.

Her feelings were really hurt, even Adlet understood that. But he didn't have any words to console her.

#



An hour later, while the six Heroes kept careful watches on their surroundings, they set foot onto the lava belt.

The lava belt's surface was covered with dark gray rugged rocks. The rocks had become red here and there and were extremely hot. The heat was so intense that they could feel it through the bottom of their shoes.

Sometimes steam spewed out from the cracks in the rocks. The steam was mixed with sulfur and it stank to the point where it made them screw up their faces in disgust. The land was completely devoid of life; every weed, insect, and animal had died out there.

Adlet didn't have any prior knowledge about the area since neither the Saint of the Single Flower nor the past Heroes had visited it before. As for Fremy, she had either come close multiple times or had passed it, but she'd never actually ventured inside.

"...What a strange place," Adlet muttered.

There were a series of rugged rocky hills, ranging in height between five and twenty meters. There were almost no level areas. The structure of the rocky hills was irregular and it made for a very bad field of vision. Even if one were to look over the surrounding area from a high position on one of those hills, they would not be able to see the whole area.

It was an ideal place to launch an ambush.

"It doesn't seem like this terrain formed naturally," Adlet said.

"I'd heard that originally it was a very large volcano. And when Cargikk had excavated that valley he also made the magma from here flow there."

Hans, who had climbed one of the rocky hills nearby, pointed out into a direction. "Umeow. There are Kyoma corpses over there too. It looks like Goldof is trying to make his way to the center of the lava belt."

Adlet and the others faced the direction Hans had indicated.

The dead Kyoma they found were very similar to those in the forest. They had been killed by a single thrust and their stomachs had been ripped open.

"What is Goldof doing?" Mora grumbled.

Adlet and the others then continued walking. They walked for about thirty minutes and passed a number of short, rugged hills. During their trek they repeatedly came across new Kyoma corpses.

Adlet had predicted that they would receive an ambush within the Lava Belt. But the only Kyoma they encountered were corpses. There was no indication that an ambush was coming.

"There's no one here. Chamo wonders if this is a trap," Chamo said.

*Could Goldof have possibly killed all of them?* Adlet thought.

They continued to walk onward and started to see a giant trapezoid hill. When they climbed the thirty-meter hill, they found that the center had been gouged out and below was a pit seventy meters in diameter.

Looking down into that hollow, Adlet gulped involuntarily.

"...What in the hell..."

In the pit there was a large amount of Kyoma corpses, probably over two hundred. Adlet snapped out of his shock and rushed down the slope.

"Could Goldof-san have possibly done this on his own?" Rolonia asked.

"That can't be it. If he could kill all of these alone then he isn't human."

Adlet inspected the Kyoma corpses. The injuries that proved fatal were almost all from bites or claws. There were also those that had been killed by fire or acid. Their wounds were still fresh and it seemed that they had died just a few hours earlier.

"Was there a fight among the Kyoma?" Adlet muttered. There were cuts all over the ground and pieces of broken rock were scattered about. It must have been a violent battle.

Looking at the faces of the many Kyoma Fremy said, "The majority were on Tgurneu's side. But there is also a considerable amount of Cargikk's Kyoma mixed among them. By looking at this there is no doubt that this was an internal battle among the Kyoma."

They had already heard from Fremy that there was a complicated struggle among the Kyoma. According to her, the Kyoma were divided into three factions. One was the largest, Cargikk's faction, and the next powerful was Tgurneu's side. Finally, the Kyoma traitor Dozzu had his faction hidden among both Cargikk's and Tgurneu's.

"Cargikk and Tgurneu fought?" Adlet asked.

"...I don't know. Certainly Cargikk and Tgurneu oppose one another, but they don't seem like the type of fools that would quarrel in the middle of their fight with the Six Flowers."

"If that's the case, then was it Dozzu, meow? I have absolutely no idea what kind of person he is."

"I wonder if there are many on Dozzu's side who could cause a battle like this....it's difficult to think about it." Fremy leaned her head to the side in thought.

Even if there were information they did not know, what they did understand was that something was unfolding. But would the situation be advantageous or unfavorable for the Heroes? And how was Goldof involved?

"If the Kyoma are really killing one another, then for now I am grateful. But what's more important is that we search for Goldof."

"What? You came to search for Goldof?" A voice asked from behind the group.

The moment they heard it Adlet threw down his iron box on reflex and drew his sword. Similarly, everyone except for Rolonia readied their weapons. There was no way they could forget that high-pitched, gentle voice and its polite and elegant manner of speech.

"I thought that without a doubt you had come to kill me."

There was a girl on the slope surrounding the basin. She was sitting atop one of the Kyoma corpses, staring down at the Heroes with an air of composure. She was clad in an extravagant white and black armor while wearing a helmet adorned with rabbit decor.

*How did she appear all of a sudden?* Adlet wondered. Just several seconds earlier there had been no one there.

"It's been a long time, Heroes of the Six Flowers."

Adlet had a feeling that they would probably meet again. And there she was, the first impostor whom they had fought almost to the death just four days ago: Nashetania.





### Chapter Two: Part One

"Hey, what in the world happened after I lost consciousness in the Illusion Fog Barrier?" Adlet had asked his companions three days earlier at the Eternal Flower.

Seriously injured, Adlet had passed out on the spot right after the battle in the Illusion Fog Barrier, which pretty much meant that he didn't know what had happened from that point until when he woke up the next morning. So his companions took turns filling him and Rolonia in on what had happened that night.

Hans, Mora, Chamo, and Goldof chased after Nashetania throughout the night. Right after it was revealed that she was the impostor, Nashetania deactivated the Illusion Fog Barrier. However, Mora told them that even if it were deactivated the fog would retain its effect until it had completely cleared up.

Hans and Chamo weren't injured at all. They even said that there were times when they were certain they had killed Nashetania, but somehow, she was still able to get away each time.

"Nashetania used some kind of strange power. We thought we had her cornered, but then she would disappear the next instant. And we know she wasn't killed because there was no dead body left behind," Chamo said.

"That ability...I've seen it before." Adlet recalled the moment after Nashetania's true identity had been revealed.

It was when Mora smashed Nashetania's head open. The body immediately disappeared then and the genuine Nashetania reappeared somewhere else. The ability was certainly puzzling, but it didn't seem like the power of the Saint of Blades.

"I don't understand how it's possible, but Nashetania is able to use the power of a Kyoma. Perhaps it's the ability of a Kyoma that can conceal itself," Fremy said.

Even though Adlet had been taught by the Anti-Kyoma specialist Atro Spyker and had possessed a considerable amount of knowledge about the abilities and ecology of the Kyoma, he didn't know anything about a concealing Kyoma.

"Concealing Kyoma are extremely rare. There are perhaps only five among all of the Kyoma. I've heard stories about them, but I've never actually seen their ability."

"What kind of power is it?"

"In a word, it's like hypnotism." Fremy then continued to explain.

"The concealing Kyoma emits an anesthetic in the form of vapor from all over its body while releasing a specific sound wave at the same time. The person that breathes the anesthetic in and hears the sound would temporarily lose their ability to perceive the concealing Kyoma."

Although the ability that Nashetania had used was even more unique, she had the ability to make them hallucinate and think that she was actually there, Fremy told them.

"...That's unbelievable," Adlet said.

A cold sweat broke out in Adlet's body. With that ability she could approach them while invisible and ambush them from behind without even the slightest resistance. Upon seeing Adlet's worry though, Hans merely laughed and rejected the idea.

"Meowhi. As far as I can tell, her ability was not that strong."

"What do you mean?"

"I've seen the princess' concealing ability multiple times. She can probably make herself disappear for about ten seconds, meow. But I should add that after she uses the ability she can't use it again for a period of five minutes. So this is just a theory, but...she can probably only use the concealing ability to escape."

Fremy's eyes widened in shock.

"That is quite the analysis. You're pretty much right."

Fremy added to Hans' explanation: The concealing ability exhausts a considerable amount of physical energy.

So while using the ability, she wouldn't be able to attack or do anything else. At most she would only be able to run. This was something shared by all of the concealing Kyoma.

"Come to think of it, my master did tell me that there were Kyoma that used hypnotism, although they were only a few. However, the effect of their abilities merely lasts for a moment."

"...I've had this question for a long time, but who is Atro Spyker? How did he investigate the Kyoma's way of life so thoroughly?"

"I don't know. I've asked him many times as well before, but I never got an answer," Adlet said. Fremy looked away as if thinking about something.

"Atro Spyker is not important at the moment. What we need to know is whether or not there's a way to break through the concealing ability." Mora said.

"When the concealing Kyoma use their ability they give off a sweet scent. We should be able to know if their ability has been used from that," Fremy replied.

"If she uses it, what should we do?"

"If you focus your concentration, squint your eyes, and hurt yourself, it will undo the hypnotism. The pain from biting down on your tongue really hard should be enough. Then you will be able to see through the concealing ability."

"I see. So you're saying that if there is a strange sweet smell, we should strain our eyes and bite our tongues?"

"That's right."

*I'm really grateful that Fremy is here,* Adlet thought. The concealing power was not very powerful. Nevertheless, if they had fought without knowing the truth about the ability they might have fallen into a dangerous predicament.

But no matter what kind of ability it was, if he could just understand the secret behind it then he wouldn't fear it.

#

The moment Nashetania had finished with her greetings a gunshot rang through the air. A blade sprung up from the ground and repelled the bullet, sending it flying to some unknown direction.

"You're violent, Fremy-san."

Having blocked Fremy's bullet, Nashetania calmly gets off the Kyoma corpse. Fremy was loading her next bullet, but Adlet stopped her.

"That's....Nashetania-san?" Rolonia asked from behind Adlet.

"Nice to meet you. You must be Rolonia-san. I look forward to our time together."

Nashetania placed her hand on her chest and bowed Rolonia awkwardly bowed her in response.

"What's going on with Goldof?" Adlet asked and Nashetania pointed south.

"Goldof is about twenty kilometers over there. After finishing up a bit of business for me, I think he will be making his way here."

"What is this 'bit of business'?"

"It's a secret," Nashetania said and impishly placed her fingers on her lips. Her behavior was completely the same as when he had first met her in prison.

Adlet shot a fleeting glance at the back of his hand. All six of the petals were still on the crest. If Goldof was a genuine Flower then he was at the very least not dead. However, if he was the seventh then that was another story.

"Did you use him to lure us here?"

"There's no way I could do that. I only wished to help Goldof. I didn't expect all of you to follow after him," Nashetania said in a tone that seemed to suggest she was having fun.

She was clearly lying and Adlet was confident that he and the others had fallen into her trap. Nashetania was definitely planning something, so Adlet looked around his surroundings trying to figure out how she was going to trap them.

"How did you request for his help?"

"Goldof and I are connected on an emotional level. It's not necessary to tell him anything. If I just wish for help then he will come rushing, no matter where he is."

"What are you trying to say? He'll come even though you betrayed him?"

Nashetania didn't pay Chamo's words any mind.

"Is Goldof the seventh?" Adlet asked.

"You're terrible, Adlet-san. I can't believe you'd doubt my precious Goldof. He is a true Hero of the Six Flowers. And since I'm vouching for him there isn't any mistake about it."

She had probably come to ridicule them. Adlet was getting annoyed by her joking attitude.

"By the way, after we're done here I'm going to kill you," Adlet said.

"Oh, how scary."

"When is your 'precious Goldof' going to rush back to you?"

Nashetania began to giggle. "Goldof, help! I'm here! I'm going to be killed!"

Adlet scowled at her unamusing joke. To his side Fremy and Hans traded glances. Then they nodded towards Adlet.

"Kill her," Adlet commanded.

Fire shot out from Fremy's rifle and Hans charged directly at her.

At the same time Adlet turned around. Just as he had thought, about 30 Kyoma appeared. The Kyoma readied the rocks that were turning red from the heat and started to throw them at the Heroes.

"Leave the rear to me!" As soon as Adlet shouted, he took out a flash pellet from a pouch around his waist and threw it.

Although the massive flash of light blinded the Kyoma, it didn't stop them from throwing the scorching stones. Nevertheless, their aim went wild and the Heroes were easily able to dodge their attacks.



Suddenly, one of the fallen Kyoma corpses by Adlet's feet moved, extending its antennae and aiming for Adlet's neck.

"Watch out!" Rolonia shouted, her whip cutting off the antennae right before it could reach Adlet.

A strange smelling blood spewed out from the severed antennae and the Kyoma screamed. One by one the fallen Kyoma began to move and rushed towards the Heroes.

"Rolonia! Mora! The three of us will stop the Kyoma," Adlet shouted just as a blade sprung up from the ground and flew towards him. Rolonia again saved Adlet, breaking the sword before it made contact.

"Umeomeow! Leave the princess to me!" Hans shouted as he twirled through the air and cut at Nashetania with his blade. Nashetania made another blade spring out from the ground to meet his attack.

"Hans! I'll back you up!" Fremy said. She chucked bombs towards Nashetania and then shot at her. Nashetania rolled across the ground and dodged both of the attacks.

Both Hans and Fremy could generate more force than Nashetania. Together there was nothing she could throw at them that they couldn't handle.

"Fremy! Be careful of her concealing ability," Adlet shouted.

"You don't need to tell me."

Nashetania started to flee. She deflected Fremy's bullets with the hilt of her rapier and summoned blades from the ground to halt Hans' charge.

"Can Chamo help too?" Chamo asked Adlet, referring to the Jyuma she had spat out. But Adlet shook his head.

"Nashetania must still be planning something. Guard the perimeter and prepare for the next attack!"

"Understood."

The hectic battle waged on for several minutes after that. Fremy and Hans fought with Nashetania while Adlet, Mora, and Rolonia were keeping the Kyoma that was trying to assist Nashetania at bay. Protected by her Jyuma, Chamo stood on the lookout for potential reinforcements, but Adlet and the others clearly had the advantage in the battle and there was no indication that Nashetania was planning another trap.

Adlet drove his sword into the top of a Kyoma's head as it was rushing towards him. Then as it staggered, Rolonia's whip cut it to shreds. The Kyoma died, spewing a geyser of blood.

There were about 30 Kyoma. And though Adlet couldn't call that a small number, the Heroes were more than enough to stop them. So as long as things remained as they were, they were going to win.

"...No way. Was she really like this?" Adlet muttered as he fought.

Adlet couldn't shake the feeling that something was off. When they were in the Illusion Fog Barrier she had enacted an elaborate and careful plan, so she didn't seem like the type of person who would challenge an enemy to a fight without a strategy.

"Meow!"

Hans was cutting through the blades that Nashetania was desperately conjuring up from the ground in order to stop him. Meanwhile a single Kyoma that the Heroes had failed to hold off managed to make its way over to Nashetania and was struggling to protect her.

"You won't get away," Fremy said, then shot a bullet through Nashetania's leg.

Nashetania winced in pain. The playful attitude had vanished from her expression. "I'm sorry about this, everyone. But can you please hurry and help me?!"

Still, for some reason Adlet didn't feel at ease. *Nashetania is definitely planning something. Was she planning an even greater ambush? Was she planning to take Goldof hostage? Or was she intending to direct Tgurneu to their location?*

"Hey, Adlet," Chamo said as she looked on over the battle as a spectator. "It would be great if you could kill Nashetania soon."

"...Got it! I'll do it!" Adlet decided. Perhaps there was some kind of trap. But taking down the enemy in front of their eyes was more important than being worried about some potential trap.

At that moment a single Kyoma slipped past Rolonia's whip and Mora's fist, and rushed towards Nashetania. It was a lizard Kyoma with rock-like skin. Nashetania dodged Hans' attack and mounted it. Without missing a beat, the Kyoma dashed away from the battlefield. Perhaps it thought it could take Nashetania to safety.

"Where are you going, meow!"

The rock lizard's movements were not that fast, so Hans chased after Nashetania and tried to jump onto the Kyoma's back. But as he was in the air, a giant moth Kyoma glided from the sky and knocked him down. Fremy then shot at Nashetania's back but missed. The moth voluntarily placed its body in front of the attack to protect her. Shot in the chest, a sticky fluid shot out of the moth as it plummeted to the ground.

During this battle, ten of Chamo's Jyuma had managed to maneuver themselves so that they were now blocking Nashetania's path. They had formed a line and were charging at Nashetania all at once.

*She's been stopped*, Adlet thought.

But Nashetania finally replied to Hans' question. "Where am I going? I'm running away." As the Jyuma bore down on her, Nashetania boldly laughed. "And I'm running because my business is done here."

The next instant all of the Jyuma stopped moving. They had not been stabbed with Nashetania's blades, nor were they being attacked by anyone.

*What happened?* Adlet thought.

But while Adlet was distracted, the Kyoma seized the opening and a lion Kyoma came from behind with an attack aiming for Adlet's neck. Adlet stooped down to avoid the attack, then twisted to face the creature and threw a poison dart at its face.

While the heroes were occupied Nashetania had slipped away.

"Let's go! Quickly, quickly!"

Nashetania slapped the back of the lizard Kyoma as it continued its sluggish run. At the same time she deflected Fremy's bullets with her blades while Hans' attacks were blocked by other Kyoma that was rushing towards him.

The Kyoma that Rolonia and Mora were fighting then simultaneously moved to a position behind Nashetania, aiding in holding off Fremy and Hans.

*Should I go after Nashetania?* Adlet wondered. *But something isn't right. Why had the Jyuma stopped?*

"Chamo, what's going on?!" Adlet shouted and Chamo rushed towards him.

She looked strange and was pressing her hands to her stomach with a dumbfounded look on her face. She then looked down at her hands, then to her body, and muttered, "...Huh? What's...?"

The next instant Chamo pressed her hand to her mouth. Then large amounts of blood started to spill from it, seeping out from the spaces between her fingers. Unable to even shout, Chamo slowly fell to the ground. At the same time the Jyuma were all sucked back into Chamo's mouth. It seemed like Chamo had been attacked, yet Adlet hadn't seen anything that could have done it.

"Chamo?!"

Mora and Rolonia rushed over. Mora helped Chamo up and Rolonia tried to stop the blood.

All three of them were confused and was at a loss. They couldn't find any injuries on Chamo's body.

"...What happened, Chamo?"

Still covering her mouth, Chamo began to tremble. Perhaps it was the first time in her life that she had ever experienced the fear of death.

"My stomach....inside....blade...." Chamo managed to say before vomiting a large amount of blood again.

Fremy and Hans chased after Nashetania as she tried to escape from the basin. But because the Kyoma were holding Hans and Fremy off, gradually Nashetania was able to pull away and eventually she went over the slope of the basin and disappeared from sight.

#

Nashetania knew exactly what had happened inside Chamo's stomach. She was the one who had caused it to happen after all.

Certain Saints knew of a technique that could place a part of one's essence into another object, creating objects that held unique power. Those objects were generally called Sacred Instruments.

When it came to producing the Sacred Instruments, the greatest master in all of history was the Saint of the Single Flower who had produced the crests of the Six Flowers. At the moment, the Saint of Mountains, Mora, and the Saint of Salt, Weylynn, were the only known users of this technique. Chamo and Rolonia couldn't use it at all while Fremy also seemed unskilled at it.

The target of the power transfer was usually books or stakes written with holy words, or various kinds of jewels. And it was said that to put power into a crest like the Saint of the Single Flower was the highest level of the skill.

Publicly, Nashetania told the world that she couldn't use the technique either. But that was a lie. She wouldn't be able to accomplish her trap had people found out that she could actually make Sacred Instruments.

#

It was about two years ago.

Nashetania had left Piena and was visiting the Head Temple with over twenty attendants accompanying her. Among them were her guards, her horse coach drivers, her maids helping with food and clothing, and even the person who took



care of Nashetania's pet. At that time Weylynn, the deputy leader of the temples, did not seem very pleased by the extravagance.

"Princess, it is rare for you to come all the way to the head temple. Is everything okay?" Weylynn asked.

Nashetania was usually in Piena, training against Goldof or a group of knights. She rarely left the kingdom.

"Same as usual. I just came on a whim," Nashetania said, evading the question.

At that time anti-Kyoma battle training was being held at the Head Temple. At the fighting arena inside the temple, Chamo Rosso's Jyuma were fighting with other Saints. Slug and water snake Kyoma were attacking the Saints relentlessly. Asley the Saint of Ice, Lenelle the Saint of Fire, and other powerful warriors were using their abilities to fight the Jyuma.

The training was just like a real battle. And the blood spilling onto the ground was not just the Jyuma's.

"...Wow."

The spectacle made Nashetania exclaim in wonder.

"The girl right in the middle is Chamo-san, right? She's a cute kid. She's definitely going to grow into a beautiful woman."

Weylynn was confused by Nashetania's carefree smile.

"...Um, Princess. Perhaps you didn't know upon coming here, but it might be better to rethink that. Chamo isn't a bad child...but she isn't very normal."

"Is that right? She isn't very gentle, huh? ....Well, I'm not worried."

"Just be careful not to get seriously hurt."

"If I were careful, then it wouldn't be training, Weylynn-san." Nashetania said, and then she took off her dress. Underneath she was wearing simple training clothes.

"You don't have to wait patiently anymore. Without further ado, Nashetania the Saint of Blades has arrived!"

"Ah, wait a second."

Ignoring Weylynn's warning, Nashetania leaped into the arena. She made blades spring up from the ground and sliced up the Jyuma.

"Huh? A new opponent? Hey Weylynn. Is this a Saint that Chamo can kill?" Chamo asked and then spat out even more Jyuma.

"No! Absolutely not! There aren't any Saints you can kill!" Weylynn shouted as she rushed into the arena to protect Nashetania. However, Nashetania continued to smile and conjured blades from the ground to begin attacking Chamo.

"Amazing! Isn't this incredible?! Is this what it's like to fight with Kyoma?!"

"They are not Kyoma. They are Chamo's pets."

For the next several minutes Nashetania continued to fight, her smile never leaving her face.

At that time the plan to eliminate the Six Flowers within the Illusion Fog Barrier was already in motion. Nashetania had come to the Head Temple in order to analyze Chamo's fighting abilities since she figured she would have to face her in battle sooner or later.

*She's a monster.* Although Nashetania was acting like a naïve and sheltered princess enjoying a fight, deep down she understood just how powerful Chamo was.

"This blade person is pretty strong. But Chamo doesn't know anything about you. Who are you?"

"My name is Nashetania. I am pleased to make your acquaintance." Nashetania smiled, though her head and her body were both covered in blood.

"Though it was a lot of trouble, Chamo's glad she came. It looks like Chamo is having more fun than Chamo thought."

"Really? I'm also having a great time."

*Though the correct interpretation is that I came solely for reconnaissance, she thought. Even if she teamed up with Goldof to fight Chamo, she was uncertain if she could defeat her. Let alone if she had to face Chamo one-on-one. getting the genuine Heroes of the Six Flowers to eliminate Chamo was dependent on whether she could successfully manipulate them into doing her bidding.*

*So I have to inject her with poison after all.*

Nashetania had poured her power into a tiny piece of diamond before coming to the Head Temple. When she wills it to activate after certain predetermined conditions were satisfied, countless blades would spring out from the rock.

But that diamond was not in Nashetania's possession at the moment.

"Princess, I ask that you please be careful! I will not be responsible if you are injured," Weylynn said. She was holding her head in distress at the corner of the arena.

Nashetania ignored her and shouted, "Well, Chamo-san. Please come at me harder!"

"Is that alright, Princess? You might die."

Nashetania was covered with acid burns, fire burns, and bite marks. And her hand was sprained from an earlier fall. Perhaps it was fractured.

"Those who aspire to be Heroes of the Six Flowers cannot flinch from the likes of this."

"Well then, Chamo won't hold back."

Nashetania glanced at every seat in the arena. Her maids and the knights of her guard were all completely ashen. Beside them was the cage containing Nashetania's pets. Nashetania had three cats, four dogs, and two squirrels. Wherever she went, Nashetania usually brought them along. And at the moment her pets were afraid.

But then one of the dogs went wild. It broke the lock and all the pets burst out of the cage. Giving it a sideways glance, Nashetania chuckled slightly.

*Do it, Dozzu.*

"...Ku."

A slug Jyuma's tail knocked Nashetania's rapier out of her hand and sent it flying. Weylynn then rushed to the center of the arena and placed herself between Nashetania and Chamo.

"Wait a minute. Chamo, Princess, It's about time you listened to me. If this continues there will be corpses."

Nashetania picked up her rapier and pointed the tip at Chamo.

"Weylynn-san. I cannot quit."

"But, Princess..."

"I would like to become strong. If I'm not strong then I won't be able to protect my people, my father, or anyone else. So I can't be scared of an enemy of this level."

Chamo responded to Nashetania's provocation. "...This level?"

Pretending not to have heard what she had said, Nashetania continued. "I want to fight a more powerful opponent. This, this still is not enough."

"Is that so, Princess?"

Chamo smiled, but underneath that smile was a faint anger.

"Well, Chamo is sorry. Chamo is sorry for taking it easy on you all this time. Now, Chamo will give you a serious fight."

Chamo stuck a piece of foxtail grass down her throat and all of her Jyuma were released into the arena.

"Stop, Chamo!" Weylynn shouted.

Weylynn teamed up with Nashetania, and one by one produced pillars of salt to block the Jyuma's attacks. At the same time the Asley and the Lenelle leapt into the arena and held back the Jyuma's assault.

"What are you doing, Weylynn-san?! You're being rude!"

"Shut up, foolish princess! I'm at the limit of my patience!"

Weylynn grabbed the struggling Nashetania and ran. But the Jyuma circled around them to prevent their escape and then started to attack.

"I can't watch anymore. Protect the princess!"

Nashetania's guards entered the fray. And in that mass confusion at the arena, Nashetania was the only one secretly smiling.

#

Fifteen minutes later, Nashetania was lying down in the arena and was receiving a scolding from her maids. On the other side of the arena Chamo and Weylynn were shouting at one another.

Nashetania looked at the cage where her pets had been placed. "Hey, Porta and Puna aren't here."

Of the pets that she had brought along, one of her cats and one of her dogs were not in the cage. The maids stopped their lecture and started to search for the missing animals. They soon found the cat trembling at the edge of the audience section but the dog was nowhere to be found.

"Dog? Got it. We'll look."

After hearing what had happened, Chamo and Weylynn both looked around the arena.



"...maybe..."

Chamo stuck her foxtail grass down her throat and spat out a single giant slug. She then smacked its back again and again. And with a belch, something came out from the slug's throat.

"....Haa....HAA.....! Porta! Porta!" Nashetania screamed, rushing over and lifting the dog up into a hug.

It was a strange-looking dog. Its face and its body were round and it didn't quite look like a squirrel or a dog. The tips of its fur had been digested, but it didn't seem to have any serious injuries.

"Chamo probably swallowed it without realizing. Hey, you can't eat bad things," Chamo said, scolding her Jyuma.

"Porta, hold on. Porta!" Nashetania shouted her dog's name over and over again. And while watching, Weylynn grabbed her head in distress.

But no one other than Nashetania knew that during the battle that dog had rushed around the arena, as if it were scared. And after confirming that no one was looking at it, the dog jumped into the mouth of the slug Jyuma.

The dog held the tiny diamond fragment in its mouth. Then it pressed the fragment into the inner walls of the slug Jyuma's stomach.

That dog was named Porta. Yet it was nothing more than an alias it had used to sneak around the world.

His true name was Dozzu and he was one of the three Commanders that governed the Kyoma.

"...I was successful, Nashetania," Dozzu said quietly to Nashetania. Only Nashetania could hear his voice.

The dull-nerved slug Jyuma would probably not notice a jewel being inserted into its stomach. In other words, Chamo would also be unable to detect that there was a jewel inside her.

And when the conditions were met and Nashetania had willed it, the gem would release its power causing dozens of blades to slice out from the slug Jyuma's stomach. Since the slug Jyuma was in Chamo's stomach the blades would also reach Chamo's organs.

The only conditions for its activation were that Nashetania had to be right next to Chamo, and that Chamo needed to attack Nashetania.

However, since Nashetania was still inexperienced as a Saint, the power she was able to put into the gem was not very strong. And if Nashetania were more than one kilometer apart from Chamo then it would lose its effectiveness.

There were only two ways to be released from the Blade Gem. Either Nashetania released Chamo herself or Nashetania died.

Nashetania couldn't dare activate the gem while they were in the Illusion Fog Barrier. Plus, even if she had, it would probably have been meaningless. It was better to retain the gem as a trump card.

And she estimated it would take a little over three hours from the time of the gem's activation for Chamo to die.

### Chapter Two: Part Two

"...Ge...ge....guugee...."

Chamo's cries of agony echoed throughout the Lava Belt among the mountains of Kyoma corpses. Chamo was desperately trying to throw up the Blade Gem, but only vomit and blood poured out from her mouth.

"Chamo-san...try to hold on."

Mora and Rolonia's efforts to administer first aid were also futile. Chamo's stomach possessed extremely unique properties, which meant that conventional first aid wouldn't work. Mora sent energy into Chamo's body, but all it did was increase Chamo's energy; it couldn't remove the gem.

"We have no choice but to kill Nashetania after all," Adlet muttered.

With Mora's abilities they were able to mostly understand the properties of the Blade Gem and estimated that there were about three hours left until Chamo's life would be taken from her. And they knew that with Nashetania's power the gem would lose its effectiveness at a certain distance. According to Mora the distance was probably around one kilometer.

Mora also told Adlet that there were only two ways to render the power of the gem ineffective: either Nashetania herself calls it off, or they kill her.

Even now as she chanted an incantation, Mora continued to analyze the gem embedded within Chamo's stomach.

At the moment Hans and Fremy were chasing after Nashetania. If they ever lose sight of Nashetania then Chamo's rescue would be difficult. So Adlet waited anxiously for their return.

"Obachan...Chamo won't die, right?" Chamo asked with a voice devoid of energy.

Mora took her small hand to provide encouragement. "What are you talking about? You're lucky to have all of us. Do you think that we will easily let you die?"

"...Aha. So that's what this was..."

*She must have set this up a while ago,* Adlet thought. Judging from Nashetania's behavior, the gem wasn't inserted while they were in the Illusion Fog Barrier. It must have been placed into her body way before the Majin had awoken.

*I should have expected this. Nashetania has been preparing for this fight for years,* Adlet thought right before Hans returned.

"What happened, Hans?"

"Meow. I lost sight of her for a second, meow. But I managed to find her again."

Hans' expression lacked his usual air of playfulness. Even he understood the seriousness of Chamo's condition.

"She is sitting at the center of a circle of around thirty Kyoma about a kilometer from here. She's just smiling and relaxing as if everything is going great. It's disgusting. But I couldn't see any other Kyoma, meow."

"What about Fremy?"

"She is watching nearby. She isn't foolish enough to fight them by herself."

"This situation has me worried. And I'm worried about Fremy too," Adlet added.

"There is nothing else to be worried about. I didn't see Tgurneu...or Goldof, meow."

Adlet frowned. But things were clear. Just as Mora's analysis had indicated, Nashetania could not leave Chamo's vicinity. So it seemed that she was correct in saying the effective range of the gem was one kilometer.

"First we'll take Chamo away. It seems that would negate the effectiveness of the gem. Mora, can we move Chamo?" Adlet asked, but Mora shook her head sadly.

"Chamo is just barely holding on. I don't know what would happen if she were to be moved."

"...So we have no choice but to kill Nashetania." In a hurry Adlet took out his weapons from his iron box and replenished the pouches on his belts. "Rolonia, Fremy and I will kill Nashetania. Hans and Mora, you stay here and protect Chamo."

Adlet preferred to have Hans remain with Chamo since his strength was the most reliable. Though Tgurneu hadn't appeared yet, he wanted Hans to stay on the lookout.

"Understood. We will leave the Princess-san to you three, meow."

"And Mora, can you call to Goldof again using your mountain echoes?"

Mora nodded. She took a deep breath and activated her ability. **"Goldof! Where are you? I've been calling you again and again! Chamo is being killed by Nashetania! Come back and help Chamo!"**

With Chamo collapsed on the ground, Mora called to Goldof over and over using the mountain echoes and explained the situation. However, it seemed that once again her voice echoed futilely across the lava belt.

"So he isn't going to come back after all," Mora finally concluded.

"...Ad-kun, what will you do about Goldof-san?"

Adlet was unable to find an answer to Rolonia's question. For starters he didn't know whether Goldof was genuine or not. He couldn't tell if Goldof was the seventh and had lured them to the current location with the intent of killing Chamo. If the latter were the case then he had to anticipate fighting with Goldof.

However, the possibility still remained that Goldof had been deceived by Nashetania and had just been used by her. Him not returning to the group might mean that he too could be in danger.

"...Let's put off talking about Goldof."

Unable to come up with a solution, Adlet simply decided to postpone the topic.

"Sorry, but Goldof will need to hold out on his own. At the moment we should concentrate on helping Chamo. We'll be back."

Adlet took Rolonia with him and together they headed north.

#



The rocky hills stretching across the lava belt were terribly difficult to traverse. But Adlet and Rolonia continued to walk north, jumping over valleys and avoiding the heat spewing out from the geysers. After continuing for about five minutes the two of them heard gunfire. Fremy was fighting the Kyoma.

They finally managed to reach the meeting place that Hans had indicated and saw that Fremy had taken up a position at the summit of one of the rocky hills and was attacking the Kyoma charging up towards her.

"Nashetania escaped to the west. Follow her!" Fremy shouted.

Without any hesitation Adlet turned his back on Fremy and headed west. Then looking out from the top of the highest rocky hill in the area, Adlet could see something moving within the hill's shadow about thirty meters ahead.

"Do you think you'll get away?!"

Adlet then chased after the figure, running with all of his strength. As he ran across the hill he spotted Nashetania at the center of about twenty Kyoma. She was straddling the back of a giant wolf Kyoma as she fled, all the while remaining conscious of what was happening behind her.

Halfway down Adlet's descent of the hill, two Kyoma had come to attack him from below. A spider Kyoma spat out its thread as a giant snake Kyoma spouted out fire. Adlet immediately jumped back to avoid the attacks. But at the moment he landed the ground suddenly crumbled and he went tumbling down the slope.

"What are you doing, you idiot?!" Fremy shouted as she shot the spider Kyoma.

Adlet apologized and stood, then dodged the snake Kyoma's attack before twisting its neck.

It was tough for Adlet to fight on the lava belt where it was difficult to gain proper footing, so his usual nimbleness and agility were limited.

"Ad-kun! Another one is coming!" Rolonia shouted, indicating a Kyoma heading towards them from the west.

"I'm leaving it to you, Rolonia!" Adlet said then he slipped past the Kyoma and chased after Nashetania.

The reason Nashetania was only attacking them a little bit at a time was because she was just trying to stall them. She was probably content with simply running and drawing out the fight.

Rolonia took out her whip. The moment the claws of the Kyoma she was fighting had closed in on her neck, a scream echoed throughout the lava belt.

"Don't move, you filthy, rotten, inferior little insect. I'll make you stop breathing! I'll stop your heart!"

The whip instantly sliced open the Kyoma, releasing a large amount of blood onto the ground.

Adlet, Rolonia, and Fremy then chased after the group of Kyoma as fast as they could. And little by little the distance between them decreased.

"I'm sorry Fremy," Adlet said to Fremy running alongside him.

"Huh?"

"If I had listened to what you'd said and acted carefully then this kind of thing wouldn't have happened."

"You're an idiot, aren't you? How is apologizing to me going to help?" Fremy said coldly. "Don't worry so much. I'm not even angry."

Adlet nodded and continued to run.

Adlet noticed that Nashetania was running in an arc. She was making a semicircle with a radius of about one kilometer from the center of the basin where Chamo was. At first they headed towards the north side of the basin, but now they were already on the opposite southern side.

Just as Mora had surmised, Nashetania could not distance herself for more than one kilometer from Chamo's position.

After a while the three heroes had managed to close the distance between themselves and Nashetania to about a hundred meters. Fremy produced a bomb on the palm of her hand and loaded it into the front of her rifle. The explosive detonated about ten meters from Nashetania's side.

Adlet also made a simple sling with his rope and threw bombs at Nashetania.

"I wonder if she'll continue to run like this until Chamo dies," Fremy said as they ran.

"Maybe. But if things stay like this then we can catch her!" Rolonia replied.

If they continued to run while restricting Nashetania's movements with bombs then they would definitely be able to catch her soon. Nashetania was only one human, and other than her there were twenty Kyoma. Adlet was pretty sure that the three of them should be able to win.

"This is strange, Adlet," Fremy said.

"Yeah, I've been thinking the same thing."

Fremy and Adlet stopped their barrage of bombs since it was slowing them down. Instead they increased their pace so Nashetania wouldn't get away.

"What's the matter? Don't you want to fight?" Rolonia shouted to Nashetania while tilting her head to the side.

Nashetania most likely understood the situation as well. No matter how much she ran about, there was no way she could continue to flee within a one kilometer radius. And there was no way that just twenty Kyoma would be able to fully protect her. It seemed unlikely though that Nashetania had revealed herself just to be killed. Adlet figured she was still concealing some sort of plan or method of escape.

It seemed that Fremy had also realized the same thing and she was trying to figure out what Nashetania was thinking.

"Adlet, to me this doesn't look like anything other than another trap."

"I agree. Are they waiting to attack us?"

"...Maybe it's the same kind of trap that they had set for Chamo," Fremy replied.

*That doesn't seem likely,* Adlet thought.

Adlet had traveled with Nashetania for eleven days until they had reached the Wailing Demon Territory. However, after Adlet had found out that Nashetania was an impostor he reexamined both himself and his equipment to see whether Nashetania had planted anything on him within their time together. But there was nothing strange about him or his tools. So at the very least Nashetania hadn't laid any traps on him.

Fremy and Nashetania had only been in contact with one another for about a day. So it didn't seem likely that there was a chance for Nashetania to place anything on her. And she hadn't met Rolonia at all. *Most likely Chamo was the only person she'd put a blade gem into.*

"Is there anything else? Another reason why Nashetania would reveal herself so foolishly?" Fremy asked.

That was when Adlet got an idea. "Fremy, have you kept an eye on Nashetania all this time?"

"No, I kept losing her....that's right, the transforming Kyoma."

Adlet nodded.

"Huh? What are you talking about?" Rolonia asked.

"The Nashetania we are following right now might be a shape-shifting Kyoma that transformed itself into a replica of her."

Among the Kyoma there were beings that could freely change their appearance, but there weren't many of them. Adlet had encountered one of them once during his fight in the Illusion Fog Barrier.

It was impossible for the shape-shifting Kyoma to transform into Adlet or Hans since in order to transform entirely into them the Kyoma would need either their cooperation or their corpse. But in this case, it would be easy for them to transform into Nashetania.

"At the very least, the Nashetania we had fought was genuine. She used the power of Blades and was able to activate the blade gem within Chamo. But we have no proof whether the Nashetania ahead of us is genuine or not."

"Hans and I lost sight of Nashetania multiple times. There was enough time for her to be secretly replaced by an impostor," Fremy said.

"I see, so that's what you're talking about? Still, how can we verify that that is the real Nashetania?"

"If we see her use the power of blades then we'll know that she is genuine. There's also another way that's more certain to disclose her true identity. Isn't that right, Rolonia?" Adlet announced.

"What do you mean?"

Behind them Rolonia craned her neck in confusion. *She doesn't get it yet*, Adlet thought.

The three of them again increased their speed in their pursuit and the distance between them and the group of Kyoma circling Nashetania had dropped to around thirty meters.

Nashetania was still riding the giant wolf Kyoma and was looking around for Adlet and the others. It looked like she was worried about being sniped by Fremy.

*As soon as there is an opening*, Adlet decided.

The thing Adlet should be wary about was her concealing ability. But he'd already figured out a way to break through that too.

"Let's go!" Adlet shouted.

The next instant Rolonia's whip wrapped around Adlet's body. She then firmly planted her feet into the ground and lifted Adlet into the air with the whip.

"Be careful, Ad-kun!" Rolonia shouted, and then threw his body.



Twirling through the air, Adlet's trajectory was bound for the giant wolf Kyoma Nashetania was riding. Adlet threw a small knife as he moved through the air. The handle was fashioned with thin chains which he'd connected to his arm.

"Kyaa!"

Nashetania stopped the knife with her left arm. Blood spilled down from her wrist as she let out a cute, little scream.

Then a large number of blades sprung up from the ground and attacked the airborne Adlet. Adlet blocked them both with his sword and the metal plates in his shoes, but some of the blades grazed his body, making several shallow cuts.

Still, Adlet managed to land on the back of the giant wolf.

"Look out Adlet!" Fremy shouted as Nashetania thrust her rapier at Adlet's throat. But Adlet was able to block the sword with his armored shoulder.

At the same time Adlet had taken out one of his secret weapons. He threw a small bottle full of poison, which Nashetania swiftly knocked away with her rapier. But Adlet had predicted how she would react and the bottle was just a decoy. His next strike with his sword was the real attack.

"...Ku."

Nashetania bent low to avoid the attack. With just a few more strikes Adlet would be able to knock Nashetania off of the Kyoma's back. But in the next instant the giant wolf Kyoma twisted its body and threw Adlet off.

"Now's the time! Everyone, finish Adlet-san!" Nashetania shouted as she pressed her hand to the wound on her left arm. The Kyoma then rushed to the fallen Adlet but Fremy had shot at them as Rolonia coiled her whip around Adlet's hand.

"Here goes nothing!"

Adlet gripped onto the whip as Rolonia pulled him up through the air like a fish on a line. In the air, Adlet threw down a smoke bomb, stopping the Kyoma in their tracks and allowing himself to escape.

"This is a complete failure...well, it doesn't matter. Let's get out of here!" Nashetania said to the Kyoma that were about to launch a counter attack.

The Kyoma followed her commands and ran, all the while continuing to protect her.

"We failed, huh?" Fremy said as she helped Adlet off the ground.

She was able to escape again, but it wasn't a total loss.

Adlet showed the small knife covered with blood to Rolonia.

"If you can, Rolonia."

"Ah, so that's what your plan was."

After Adlet handed the knife over to Rolonia, he immediately resumed the chase. He could not afford to lose sight of Nashetania and the Kyoma.

Rolonia licked the blood-covered knife as she ran at his side. One of the powers of the Saint of Fresh Blood was the ability to analyze blood with her tongue. So as they chased after Nashetania, Rolonia rolled the blood around her mouth for a while.

"...So what can you tell us, Rolonia?" Fremy asked.

"I've never licked Nashetania-san's blood before, but...this is the blood of a teenage girl who is also quite a powerful Saint. And though it seems that she is very tired, she is in good physical shape and is living an incredibly prosperous life. When I think of what Nashetania-san's blood would taste like, there is no doubt that this is what it would be like."

"So we are pursuing the real Nashetania?" Adlet asked.

The distance between Nashetania and them had again widened to around a hundred meters and they could see that Nashetania was warily glancing in their direction as she straddled the giant wolf Kyoma.

Before anyone could reply to his question Adlet added, "But we knew that she was genuine the moment she used the power of blades. I was just making sure."

"Rolonia, did you find out anything else?" Fremy added.

"...although this is human blood, it has a Kyoma taste. It is an extremely unusual kind of blood. It's a mix between a Kyoma with high regenerative ability...a Kyoma with incredible strength ...and an incomprehensible Kyoma. But I have no clue how a type of blood like this could exist."

"That's good, Rolonia. Just knowing that is enough." Adlet smiled.

Adlet didn't know what kind of scheme Nashetania was planning, but the real Nashetania was indeed just within a hundred meters of their location. That was an unmistakable fact, and Adlet had no intention of letting the opportunity slip by.

"Let's take her out with everything we've got. But don't let your guard down," Adlet said, causing the look in Fremy's eye to become stern whereas Rolonia gulped uneasily.

Fremy then shot at Nashetania in the attempt to stop her while Adlet lobbed bombs towards Nashetania. The distance between Nashetania and the others was again shrinking bit by bit. The enemy's number was also decreasing, so it seemed that three of the Heroes would be enough to deal with all of them.

"Fremy and I will throw all the bombs we have then the three of us will rush them. Fremy, you take out the surrounding Kyoma, and Rolonia, you break Nashetania's sword with your whip. As for the finishing blow, leave that to me. Alright?"

Rolonia readied her whip and Fremy formed a bomb in her hand. Adlet then took out his own bombs from the pouches on his waist.

"Please keep at it! Can't you run any faster?!" Nashetania was smacking the hind of the giant wolf she was straddling, but Adlet couldn't determine whether her panic was genuine or just an act.

"After we get over that mountain, we attack."

Right after Adlet had said those words, a distant single spear ripped loudly through the air and smashed into the ground in front of the three Heroes.

The three of them stopped and looked back in the direction the spear had flown. It arrived without warning from the opposite direction of the basin Chamo was in.

No, it had probably been drawing close to them for a long time but since the three Heroes had been so focused on pursuing Nashetania they had allowed their watch over their surroundings to slip.

"...So he came."

Adlet frowned. And even though the spear didn't harm any one of them, Adlet didn't feel any kind of joy.

Goldof Aurora was standing at the summit of the rocky hill, looking down at the three Heroes.

"Goldof-san, why did you throw....?" Rolonia muttered.

But Goldof didn't reply. He just stood there, staring at them.

Meanwhile, Nashetania was using the opportunity created by the distraction to try and escape. Fremy moved to pursue, but Goldof violently started to dash towards Fremy.

"Rolonia! Stop Goldof!" Adlet shouted.

Adlet couldn't remain unsure any longer. He drew his sword and ran towards Goldof, solidifying his resolve to fight Goldof.

Goldof must have realized the situation from Mora's mountain echoes. Chamo had been attacked by Nashetania and her life was in danger. And yet despite all of that, he was still trying to protect Nashetania.

*I have no choice but to consider him as an enemy.*

Fremy threw a bomb at Goldof. As he ran Goldof covered his face with both of his hands then jumped to the side to dodge the explosion. Despite wearing a suit of heavy armor, Goldof's nimbleness put Adlet to shame. And in an instant Goldof stood back up and once again charged at Fremy.

"You think I'm going to allow you to hurt her?!"

Adlet threw a poison dart at Goldof's side, but without twisting around or even stopping, Goldof had been able to dodge it. At the same time one of Fremy's bullets slammed into Goldof's chest, throwing him backwards into a somersault before he crashed to the ground. However, the bullet was stopped by his thick armor and so it didn't cause any fatal injuries.

"Fremy! Rolonia! Follow Nashetania! Leave this guy to me!"

Nashetania was running away at full speed. But the moment the two of them tried to head off in pursuit, Goldof began to speak.

"...I can't let you go."

He stood back up and once again headed towards Fremy. Adlet took out a tear-gas bomb and chucked it. However, the bomb was not able to stop him. Goldof used both of his arms to shield his eyes and mouth and pushed out of the smoke.

Adlet let out a war cry and leaped forward, bringing down his sword towards Goldof's back. But Goldof stopped the blow with the back of his fist then grabbed both of Adlet's hands and hurled him backwards. After that he grabbed the running Rolonia by her armor, lifted her up into the air and tossed her to the ground. Even though she was clad in heavy armor, Rolonia still tumbled across the ground.

Adlet and Rolonia managed to get back onto their feet at the same time. All three of them had been careless because Goldof didn't have his spear. Nevertheless he was still highly skilled in hand-to-hand combat.

"Fremy! Don't worry about us! You cannot lose sight of Nashetania!" Adlet shouted. Fremy nodded and then ran.

Goldof then muttered something before chasing after Fremy as fast as he could. But Adlet and Rolonia were standing in his way.

"I will leave Fremy to you!" Goldof bellowed. But Adlet wondered to whom he was entrusting this task with. *Was it Nashetania or some other companion?*



Goldof turned to face Adlet and Rolonia. Then he stretched his arms out to the side and squatted low into a readied stance. It seemed that he planned to continue fighting them until the very end.

"Please wait, Goldof-san." Rolonia said in a frightened voice as she readied her whip.

"...You're in my way," Goldof said and Rolonia jumped back with a start.

"Why, Goldof?" Adlet said as he retreated backwards. He then pulled Goldof's spear from the ground, sheathed his own sword, and pointed the spear at Goldof. It was heavy and unwieldy, but that didn't mean he couldn't use it at all.

"You understand what's happened, don't you? Chamo is slowly being killed. The only way to save her is to kill Nashetania. Didn't you hear Mora's mountain echoes?"

"Please stop this, Goldof-san. We have to defeat Nashetania-san. That is the only way we can save Chamo-san," Rolonia said.

But it didn't look as if Goldof's stance had wavered in the slightest.

"Goldof, talk to us. Someone is somehow deceiving you."

"Goldof-san, don't you think this is the same as with Mora-san? Haven't you fallen into some kind of trap and now you're being forced to fight us? Am I wrong?" Rolonia inquired.

But Goldof replied quietly, "I will not let you go any further."

"Goldof."

"If you plan on going...you'll have to kill me."

Adlet looked into Goldof's eyes and a chill ran down his back. Up until then he hadn't been able to give up on the possibility that Goldof might still be their ally. But that thought vanished completely when Adlet looked into Goldof's eyes. Goldof was going to kill them. He was going to kill Fremy, Rolonia, and everyone else.

"Rolonia, do that thing."

"What's that thing?"

"I'm talking about the person who was screaming, 'die, die.' That's the thing. Become the person who will fight seriously."

"Ad-kun..."

"Kill Goldof."

Rolonia's eyes widened, but then she nodded silently. At the same time, still bent over, Goldof charged right at Adlet.

Adlet lunged with the spear with all his strength. Just moving the spear hurt his arms and Adlet realized that the ability to casually and freely wield it was proof of Goldof's uniqueness.

Right before hitting the spear, Goldof stopped with his nose just a centimeter away from the tip of the spear. The next instant he reached out to grab the handle of the spear, but Adlet had kicked him in the stomach to keep him from getting it.

"Uu!"

Even though Adlet had kicked him, he was the one knocked backwards by the blow. A shock of pain pulsed through his ankle as if he had just kicked a giant boulder. Realizing that his staggering was the best time for Goldof to come and grab the spear, Adlet swiped the weapon at Goldof's feet, but Goldof blocked the blow with his shin guards.

"Traitors will die, die, die, die! If the traitor doesn't die then the morning sun tomorrow won't rise either!" Rolonia's scream echoed through the air. Then her whip began to undulate like a snake.

Goldof rounded his back and covered his face with his arms. The whip then hit him and a sound of grating metal rang through the air.

Fear broke through Rolonia's angry facade. Her whip was imbued with the power of the Saint of Fresh Blood so with just one touch she would be able to draw out all the blood within her opponent's body. But not a single drop spilled out of Goldof. His armor had blocked all of the strikes.

"Rolonia, stay strong! Rip off his armor!" Adlet shouted and then once again thrust the spear.

Goldof jumped and the spear ineffectively stabbed into the ground.

Goldof then continued to defend against both of their attacks.

Rolonia's whip was able to catch Goldof multiple times. However, each time it was blocked by his armor and could not reach any of his blood. But it wasn't the durability of Goldof's armor that was frightening, it was his reactions. Rolonia was accurately aiming for the gaps in Goldof's armor, but with his reactions Goldof was able to move only slightly and still block them all.

Blocking another of Rolonia's strikes, Goldof stretched out his arm in an attempt to retrieve his spear. But Adlet kept moving. If he showed even the slightest opening in his defense, Goldof would be able to grab the spear. And if Adlet had stopped attacking then Goldof would probably go after Rolonia instead.

"Adlet," Goldof said as he stopped Rolonia's whip. "Don't kill the princess."

"If this is a joke then you're taking it too far." Adlet shouted and thrust the spear, aiming at Goldof's armor. If he could just take off one of his metal gauntlets then Rolonia's whip would be able to finish him off.

"Why why why won't you die! Don't touch Ad-kun, don't touch Fremy, don't touch Chamo, die!" Rolonia screamed.

The trajectory of her whip then changed. It went around Goldof's body and tried to wrap him up.

*This is no good*, Adlet thought. Rolonia was panicking.

"The princess..."

The moment the whip tried to bind him, Goldof jumped high up into the air. He then flipped his giant frame like Hans had done and slipped through a sliver of an opening left by the whip. Then once he landed back on the ground he rushed towards Adlet.

Adlet desperately swung the spear but it was just an instant too late. Goldof's shoulder collided with the spear, but not at the shaft. He collided with the handle. Then his giant hands grabbed the spear. His strength was incomparable.

In an instant Adlet released one hand from the spear. Then faster than the eye could see he pulled out some pain-inducing darts from the pouches on his waist. If the tips pierced his skin it would send waves of severe pain rushing through his body, and no matter what kind of stalwart warrior Goldof was, he wouldn't be able to fight for several seconds.

A dart was about to plunge into the hand Goldof was gripping the spear with, but then Adlet noticed that Goldof wasn't trying to yank the spear away from him. He was going after Adlet's darts.

Goldof released the spear and grabbed Adlet's hand, gripping it with such abnormal strength that Adlet was forced to drop the needles from his hand. At the same time Goldof caught the darts flying towards him with his fingers and then threw them.

"Rolonia!" Adlet shouted, but there was no way it would be quick enough.

The darts hit Rolonia and almost instantly she erupted in screams, falling down to her knees and holding her face.

*I have to protect Rolonia*, Adlet thought, and took out a bomb.

But before he could throw it Goldof took his spear back into his hands and unexpectedly spoke.

"Listen well. Nashetania is not your enemy. Fremy is." Immediately after that Goldof thrust the stone on the spear's pommel into Adlet's side. And after watching Adlet fall down into a squat, Goldof turned his back on both Adlet and Rolonia and ran away.

"...Shit."

They couldn't chase after Goldof. Adlet couldn't even move. And even if he did there was no way he could leave Rolonia alone. Adlet struggled to his feet and removed the dart from Rolonia's cheek.

"I'm...I'm alright Ad-kun."

A bit of blood had spilled out from the wound in her cheek. And with the power of Fresh Blood that was all she needed to completely remove the poison from her body.

Once healed they tried to chase after Goldof for a while, but he was too far away. Goldof was pulling farther and farther away while running along the perimeter of the one-kilometer radius circle. And after running a fourth of that distance, Adlet and Rolonia had lost sight of him.

In the distance they could hear the sound of a rifle shooting. Fremy was fighting. And on top of that it looked like she was right in the direction Goldof and Nashetania were headed.

"This is bad. At this rate Fremy will have to fight them two against one."

Adlet and Rolonia continued to run, scaling over many hills and crossing a valley. The entire time they could still hear Fremy's rifle, which gave them hope that she was still alive.

"Fremy!"

Reaching the top of a rocky hill, Adlet finally spotted her. She was at the bottom of a narrow valley surrounded by Kyoma. But Goldof was not in the area.

"We're coming!"

There were about fifteen Kyoma and they had surrounded Fremy, running about and launching attacks from all directions. But Fremy couldn't hold them. She was weakest when it came to fighting in narrow spaces.

"Fremy! Watch out!" Adlet shouted as Fremy lost her balance.

Adlet then readied his sword. He gripped the hilt tightly and focused his aim. Then he twisted the hilt and the blade from the sword shot out, causing Adlet to bend back from the recoil. The blade stabbed through a Kyoma's face. And in that opening Fremy escaped the circling Kyoma and ran to where Adlet and Rolonia were.



"I'll kill you! Die! I'll kill you! If you touch Fremy I'll kill you. Show me your insides Kyoma!" Rolonia shouted while she swung her whip. And then the Kyoma ran towards the three of them and the Heroes had no choice but to stop their pursuit of Goldof and fight the Kyoma.

### Chapter Two: Part Three

After about fifteen minutes, several Kyoma corpses were scattered around Adlet, Fremy, and Rolonia's feet. But of course they could no longer see Nashetania or Goldof.

A little while earlier there had been a powerful flash of light in the direction that Nashetania had gone, followed by the sound of thunder. But both the sound and the flash of light had faded.

"I found it," Adlet said and picked up the blade he'd shot out of his sword. He then compressed the spring within his sword hilt and reloaded the blade.

"...You helped me out there. I was in trouble," Fremy said and then heaved a big sigh of relief.

"What happened to Goldof-san? He had been running this way right?"

"Goldof ran past me earlier," Fremy replied. "He was following behind Nashetania. I wanted to kill them, but the Kyoma were in my way so I couldn't move. And there was also a small Kyoma following behind Nashetania."

"A small Kyoma? Who was it?" Rolonia asked.

"Hmm, I've never seen it before."

"I see....well anyway I'm glad that you're safe," Rolonia said, exhaling in relief.

Fremy then looked at Adlet with a reproachful stare. "Nashetania and Goldof got away," she said with her arms folded across her chest. "Unfortunately it seems you were mistaken."

"...It looks that way," Adlet said, hanging his head. Adlet had followed after Goldof this far under the impression that Goldof was just being deceived. Because of that thinking he allowed Nashetania's plan of slowly killing Chamo to continue.

When he'd first met Goldof, Adlet also hesitated to kill him. If Adlet had intended on fighting Goldof to the death from the beginning then maybe the result would have been different.

"I screwed up. Goldof is the enemy."

Adlet recalled the conversation they had at the Eternal Flower three days ago. Fremy and Mora had both said that they suspected Goldof. He should have taken their concerns more seriously. He shouldn't doubt his companions. That naive way of thinking was the underlying cause that invited this situation to occur.

"There's no need to worry. I don't think you've made a perfect decision from the beginning," Fremy added.

*Harsh as usual*, Adlet thought.

"Bu...but...there's still the possibility that Goldof-san is being deceived," said Rolonia.

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't he say that the enemy wasn't the princess, but that it was Fremy-san?"

Fremy's eyebrows twitched. "He said that I'm the enemy?"

"That's not true!" Adlet said. He understood what Rolonia wanted to say so he helped her rephrase her words. "Are you trying to say that Goldof is being tricked by someone? That someone is making him believe that Fremy is the enemy and that in order to save Chamo he has to kill Fremy. So that's why he came to stop us. Is that it?"

Rolonia nodded over and over again, but Adlet silently shook his head.

"That's not possible," Adlet said, patting his own stomach. "When Goldof fought us, he didn't care if I died. That much I know."

"If Goldof thought I was the enemy, then why did he pass right by me?" Fremy asked.

"...Um...I uh...um..." Rolonia stammered over her words.

"More importantly, I think things will get worse if we don't hurry," Fremy interrupted. "It's already been close to an hour since the Blade Gem has been activated. We have approximately two hours remaining. And on top of that, Tgurneu may be commanding all his forces to come to the lava belt."

Just as Fremy said there was absolutely no time. If Tgurneu came and attacked the lava belt Adlet and the others would be done for. The only option they would have at that point would be to move Chamo and escape, even if it wasn't possible.

"Now that she is being protected by Goldof, defeating Nashetania will be difficult. Nevertheless the three of us should still have a chance of killing her. First let's find her again and then we'll talk."

Adlet and Rolonia nodded then the three of them started to run across the craggy hills.

"This is without a doubt an unfavorable situation," Fremy said. "But confirming who the seventh is has been a great accomplishment. If we can save Chamo next then victory will be in sight."

"You're right, because now we know who the seventh is," Rolonia replied. But Adlet did not respond.

"What's the matter Adlet?"

Deep in his heart, a number of questions still lingered that remained unanswered.

If Goldof were the seventh then his battle strategy would have been much different. For example, in the Illusion Fog Barrier Goldof and Nashetania would have killed either Mora or Fremy then place the blame on Adlet. They should have been able to do something like that, but for some reason they didn't.

He also had another question. Why didn't Nashetania appear during their battle in the Valley of Spilled Blood? If she had used the Blade Gem at the same time when the trap against Mora was unfolding, then Adlet and the others couldn't have done anything salvage the situation. Why did they initiate their trap only a little at a time?

Why didn't Goldof do anything up until now? And why did he choose this moment to make his move?

And there was still one last question, one that was even more important than the others. What was Tgurneu doing? He should know at the very least that the Six were in the lava belt. Why wasn't he attacking them?

Something was strange. They were getting closer to understanding the mysteries surrounding their situation, yet there was still something Adlet wasn't able to see. However, he didn't even have a clue as to what that could be.

"Rolonia, go and inform Mora and the others about our situation. Though they may think it's unlikely, there is a possibility that Goldof and Nashetania may attack them over there," Fremy said.

"Right, got it."

"Adlet and I will continue to pursue Nashetania. If you spot an enemy, trigger this. We will rush over to you immediately," Fremy said and then handed Rolonia one of the firecrackers.

Rolonia nodded and then ran off towards where Chamo was.

"What were you doing earlier, Adlet? Aren't you the leader? Issue directions."

"Ah, right, sorry. I was thinking."

"Right. Let's go."

The two began to run with Adlet following behind Fremy.

In his head he continued to think about Goldof. He thought about the dumbfounded expression Goldof had when he realized that Nashetania was the seventh, the despair he felt when they were advancing through the Wailing

Demon Territory, and the strange expression Goldof had when he said that he would go and help Nashetania. Were all of those expressions really just an act?

Adlet didn't know. Adlet didn't get Goldof. But the idea that he was an unbelievably skilled actor was another story entirely.

#

Adlet and Fremy moved across the rock-covered lava belt while varying their footprints so that it would be impossible for someone to follow their tracks. A little earlier the two of them had spotted a point far away where a light had been flashing, but they ignored it and instead continued after Nashetania. So far they had traveled about a fourth of an arc clockwise from where Chamo was located.

Valleys, the shade of the rocky hills, and small basins... the two of them overlooked none of those as they carefully searched for Nashetania. It took time but that couldn't be helped.

"It must be a bit wrong that Nashetania can't go out more than a kilometer from Chamo. If that were true then there's no reason why we can't find her," Fremy said.

As they climbed a medium-sized rocky hill, they reached a circular basin located in the center of the hill about 20 meters in diameter. The center was smoldering and smoke was rising up into the air.



"What's that?" Adlet asked as he moved closer.

In the center there were two Kyoma corpses, both in cinders. One of them was a snake and the other looked like a human-shaped Kyoma. When he touched one of them with his hand it was so hot that he yelped unconsciously. From their positions it looked like they had been alive for several minutes while they were still on fire.

*They weren't burned with oil, nor were they showered with fire. No, perhaps it was lightning,* Adlet wondered.

"I wonder what this is," Fremy muttered. After looking closely they realized that the ground surrounding the Kyoma was also burned. And on top of that they found a number of holes in the ground.

"....Nashetania was here," Adlet whispered. When Nashetania produced blades from the ground she created holes in the same shape as the ones they were looking at now.

"Nashetania fought with someone here. I don't know whether it was an enemy or an ally, but a Kyoma that used lightning was also here."

"I wonder who she was fighting. Was this also Cargikk's doing?"

Fremy tilted her head to the side. And speaking of basin mysteries, they still hadn't resolved the mystery of the Kyoma corpse in the basin where Chamo was.

"Was Nashetania fighting one of our allies? No, there's no way that can be the case. There's no way an ally of ours could be in the Wailing Demon Territory."

"Let's think about that later. First of all we need to find Nashetania."

The two of them left the basin and continued their search. They had about two hours left.

#

When they got out of the basin they could see Rolonia running atop the rocky hill. When she spotted the two of them, she turned and rushed their way.

"How are Chamo and the others?"

"They're safe. But...a number of Kyoma came out from the forest and are prowling around them. It doesn't look like they will come and attack; it just seems like they are standing guard."

*That's strange. I wonder why Nashetania is only doing this kind of half-assed attack.*

"You didn't fight them, right?" Fremy asked.

"Hans-san said not to worry about them and to go search for Nashetania. But even Hans-san and Mora-san....were in quite a panic."

Rolonia had a depressed expression on her face.

"However, he did let me know one good thing. It looks like with Mora's power, she may be able to extend the time until Chamo-san dies for a little bit."

"How long?"

"...She said for about 30 minutes."

Even though that was good news, it was not something they could celebrate. Chamo was still in a very dangerous predicament. In addition, once Tgurneu mobilized all his forces and they arrived at Chamo's location all the remaining time would become irrelevant.

"Let's hurry. That's the only thing we can do for now," Adlet said.

There were still things he didn't know, such as what exactly was happening and whether there was something secretive going on, but Adlet didn't have the time to think about those things. They needed to find Nashetania and kill her. That was the only thing he had to focus on.

#

30 minutes later Adlet was walking through the lava belt by himself. He climbed one of the rocky hills, then at the top pressed his body to the ground and overlooked the area. He then moved to another hill and searched the area. He squinted so that he wouldn't miss even the tiniest of hiding places, and strained his ears to search for any indications of the enemy. And he did all of this while slowly advancing clockwise along the radius.

Fremy and Rolonia were not near him. Fremy was moving counter-clockwise and Rolonia was at the basin where Chamo was, searching the area. Regardless of which way Nashetania escaped they should definitely be able to find her.

Splitting up and traveling alone was dangerous, but in their current predicament they had no choice. If they found Nashetania or Goldof they would immediately explode the communication firecracker and it would call their companions. But he had yet to receive any contact from Fremy or Rolonia.

Adlet then heard something behind him so he rushed over to it. But in the valley behind him there was only steam and a small pool of hot water. Realizing that it was just the sound of a geyser erupting, Adlet clucked his tongue quietly.

That was when he spotted two Kyoma. They were heading towards where Chamo and the others were. He thought about killing them but then he reconsidered. Confronting the enemy was Mora and Hans' responsibility. He had to ignore them and continue to search for Nashetania.

"Adlet!" a voice came from in front of him. He then spotted Fremy coming right towards him.

But Adlet doubted she'd found Nashetania. If she had she would have just used the firecracker. Finally reaching him, Fremy looked at Adlet with a difficult expression on her face.

"You didn't miss her right?" Adlet asked.

"This can't be. Are we really not able to find her anywhere?" Fremy asked.

As the two of them talked Rolonia also ran over to them. She looked at their faces and immediately guessed that they had failed. It was inexplicable for them to miss Nashetania. They had searched everywhere where it seemed she could hide.

Adlet could understand why they were not able to find Goldof. He had the ability to escape beyond the Blade Gem's range of effect. But Nashetania was definitely within the area that Adlet and the others had searched.

"Why can't we find her? She's just in a kilometer radius."

"It's hard to believe that she could be hiding somewhere, but if so...where could she be?"

Adlet recalled the terrain of the lava belt, but there were no suitable hiding spots there.

"Could it be that Mora-san's analysis was mistaken?" Rolonia asked.

"That's unlikely. Mora is an excellent Saint. It doesn't seem likely that she would misjudge the effectiveness of a Saint Instrument," Fremy replied.

"But...don't you think there might be a way she is being deceived somehow?"

"Even if there were, Mora would probably know. And for someone who has only been a Saint for three years, it seems unlikely that Nashetania would be able to use such a high level skill."

While the two of them talked, Adlet unexpectedly spotted something strange. One of the Kyoma was at the top of one of the rocky hills a slight distance from their location. And in its hand it was waving something.

"...A white flag?"

The Kyoma had the head of a crow and the body of a yeti. It was holding a stick wrapped in an old rag. A piece of a white rag had been torn off and fastened to the stick that was being waving around as an improvised white flag. And that yeti Kyoma was slowly approaching the three of them.

"It's the enemy."

Fremy took out her rifle and aimed at the yeti Kyoma. But the yeti continued to wave the white flag, taking a pose that implied it would not attack with its hands.

Rolonia interrupted Fremy before she could shoot and said, "Wait a second, Fremy-san. That's a white flag."

"What's that?"

The fact that she didn't know what it signified was slightly surprising. From time to time there were things Fremy was curiously ignorant about.

"It's a sign that indicates the wielder has no intention of fighting in a battlefield. Don't you know that?"

"Humans use strange things."

As they were talking the yeti Kyoma made its way to the foot of the small rocky hill where the three of them stood. It stopped about 10 meters away. Adlet and the others readied their weapons as they watched the Kyoma.

"Good afternoon," the yeti Kyoma said.

Though Adlet didn't know the voice, he remembered that tone. It was different from the strange pronunciation present among the average Kyoma. It was a smooth and graceful way of speaking.

"Thank you for not attacking me. I got scared when Fremy took out her rifle."

"...Who are you?" Adlet asked and the yeti shrugged.

"Perhaps if you see this you'll understand," the yeti said and then extended its hand, cupping a bundle of cloth.

The yeti Kyoma then took out a large fig fruit from the cloth.

Instantly Adlet and Fremy moved at the same time. Adlet aimed his poison darts at the Kyoma's hand and Fremy shot at the fig fruit. The fruit was blown away and disintegrated into pieces.

"Unfortunately that was just a fig. My real body is in a secret location."



"...Tgurneu," Adlet said, calling the yeti Kyoma's name. No, he called the name of the Kyoma controlling the yeti.

"It seems that you all managed to find out my true form after all. That's quite the feat. How did you uncover the truth? Fremy didn't even notice it for the 18 years that we had been together."

"What do you want?"

Fremy loaded another cartridge into her rifle and aimed at Tgurneu's head. Her finger was already on the trigger and even now she looked like she was ready to shoot him dead.

"Wait, wait, wait a second Fremy. I have no intention of fighting. I want to talk."

"I don't," Fremy replied.

"Wait. Adlet, help. Stop Fremy."

Adlet did nothing to stop her. Just like Fremy, he had been waiting for the opportunity to kill Tgurneu. And there was no reason to let him live.

"I have a proposition for you, Adlet."

Rolonia also had her whip ready and was approaching Tgurneu. But Tgurneu extended both of his hands and took a step back. It was a really pathetic sight. But what he said next made Adlet pause.

"Don't you think we'll be able to defeat Nashetania if we cooperate?"

"...what?" Adlet asked automatically. What Tgurneu had said was unexpected.

"Huh? Haven't you noticed? I think it'll become clear to you if you think about it a bit. Nashetania and I are enemies."

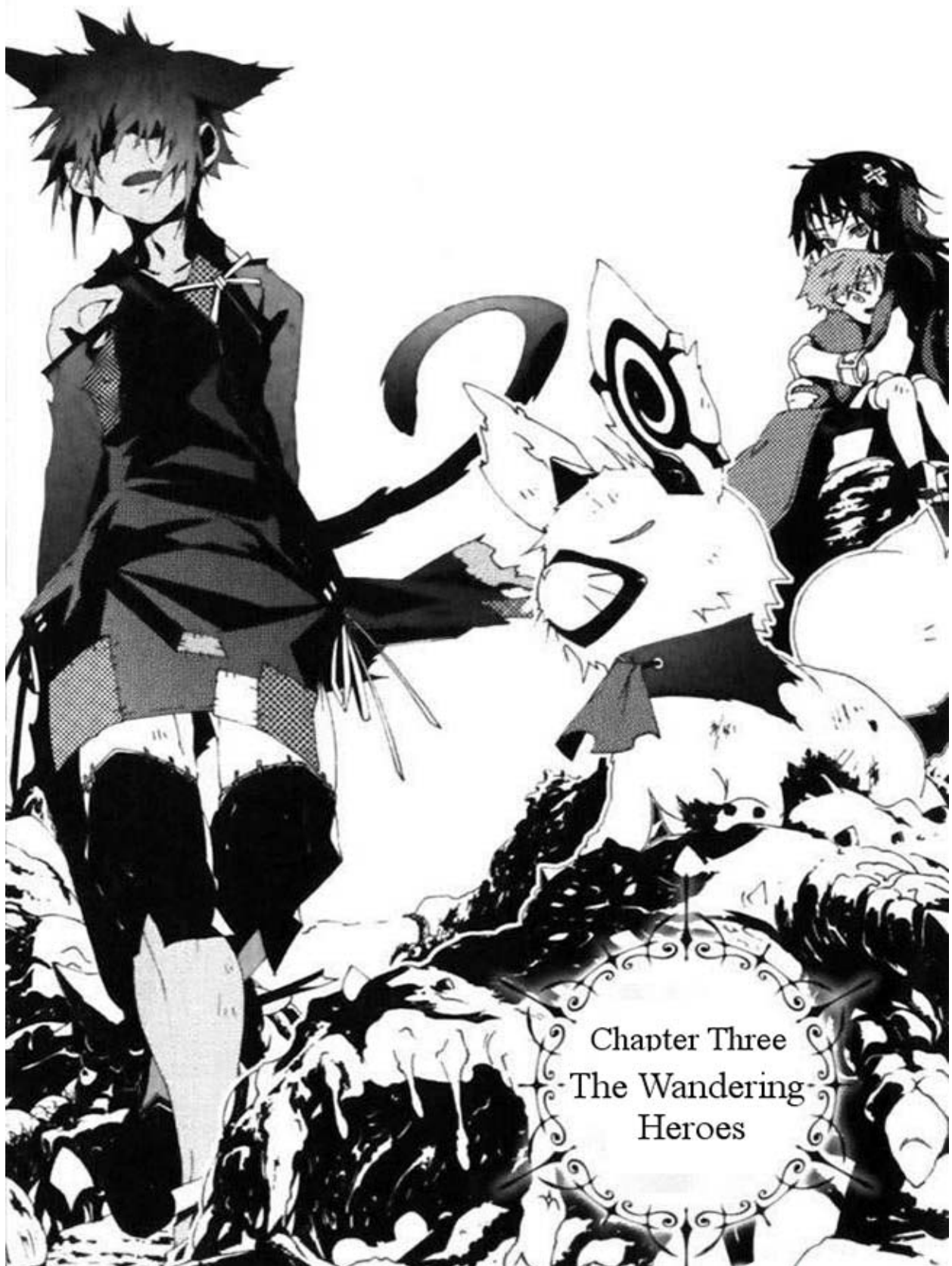
"What do you mean?"

Seeing Fremy lower her rifle, Tgurneu's bill shook. It was hard to tell, but it seemed like he was somehow laughing.

"I did not send Nashetania amongst your ranks to assassinate you. The one behind her is Dozzu, the shameful Kyoma traitor. That means Nashetania is an enemy to both myself and all of you."

"...There's no way," Adlet muttered. But he wasn't able to mutter anything else.

"By the way, you three. What happened to your greetings?" Tgurneu asked then once again his bill started to shake in laughter.



### Chapter Three: Part One

"...Eh, eguuu!" Chamo was vomiting again.

Mora had her hand on Chamo's back and poured the healing power of the mountain energy into the young girl's body. It had the ability to revive Chamo's life force, but it was not able to stop the Blade Gem in her stomach.

About one and a half hours had passed since the Blade Gem's activation. At the moment Mora was in the basin, scattered with Kyoma corpses, waiting impatiently for Adlet and the others to return with good news.

Chamo was growing weak before her eyes. Her face was pale and her eyes were vacant. Her body shook as she clung to Mora's like an infant. Mora caressed Chamo, but she was unable to do anything more than continue to send energy into her body.

"Meow, meoraa!"

Atop the basin slopes there was a ring-shaped crest where Hans was fighting with a few Kyoma. After getting rid of the three Kyoma, Hans returned to Chamo and Mora.

"I've mostly dealt with the ones in the area, meow."

Hans had already sliced down close to twenty Kyoma, but he was still completely uninjured. He didn't even look tired.

"Hans, it looks like you need to go after all. Join Adlet and the others and kill Nashetania," Mora said to Hans.

A little while ago Rolonia had returned by herself. She confirmed that Goldof was an enemy and informed them that they had lost sight of Nashetania. Then she immediately headed back to search for Nashetania.

"The current situation is not in our favor. It will be difficult for just Adlet, Chamo, and Rolonia to kill Nashetania. They need your strength as well."

However, Hans shook his head.

"If I could, I would have gone right away, meow," Hans said and then he faced the Forest of Severed Fingers. "We are being watched. If I were to leave now, soon their companions would come and kill Chamo. Mora, can you fight the enemy while giving energy to Chamo?"

She couldn't. There was absolutely no way she could fight while continuing to transfer power into Chamo.

"...Damn."

Mora ground her teeth. She could practically feel the time slipping by. Even more than that she could sense her companion's death was approaching.

Hans also made a pained face again.

Then in Mora's arms, Chamo muttered weakly. "...Cat-san, Obachan, sorry."

"Don't talk, Chamo. You'll needlessly waste your strength."

But Chamo continued to talk, a bloody froth coming out from her mouth. "Chamo was careless...Chamo is bad....and like this...Chamo isn't useful at all."

As tears flowed down from Chamo's face, Hans drew closer, tousling her hair with a hand wet with Kyoma blood.

"Don't take yourself so seriously, kid. Just be quiet and sleep."

"Chamo....is not a child."

"You still have spirit, don't you?" Hans said and then he laughed. It was surprisingly the gentlest expression Mora could remember him ever showing.

"Rely on us. We can't lose to that stupid girl, meow."

Chamo obediently nodded and closed her eyes. However, Mora knew that Hans felt uneasy. And deep down she knew he was wondering whether Adlet and the others could really defeat Nashetania.

#

Adlet, Fremy, and Rolonia had no choice but to comply with Tgurneu's request for a greeting. Adlet slightly nodded, but just that concession was enough to make him angry. *Why is this Kyoma so fussy over greetings?*

"...I get the feeling you are uneasy about hearing me talk," Tgurneu said and then nodded satisfactorily at their greetings.

Adlet pressed his hand to his throbbing chest. His throat was dry, his blood was boiling and his breathing hurt.

On that day so long ago Tgurneu had appeared in Adlet's hometown with the same kind of demeanor. He gently spoke with the villagers and smiled as if he had gained new friends. Then one night Tgurneu ensnared the villagers and Adlet's hometown was laid to waste.

And once again that expression was clearly depicted on his face. Until just yesterday, Adlet thought that his fellow villagers had killed his sister. He also mistakenly thought that his best friend who had run away was captured and killed. Everything he had ever believed was smashed to pieces.

"Ad-kun." Rolonia touched the back of Adlet's hand, bringing him back to his senses.

Even if Tgurneu was the enemy of his loved ones, at the moment Adlet could not fight Tgurneu. Saving Chamo was their top priority. For now he had to make sure of the authenticity of Tgurneu's proposal.

"Are you alright, Adlet?" Tgurneu asked.

"I don't need your concern. I am the strongest man in the world, so I'm always calm," Adlet said with a smile.

He then looked at Fremy at his side. She too had eyes full of anger, but she hadn't lost her cool. *I have to follow her example*, Adlet thought.

"I see. That's good. But more importantly let's talk about Nashetania. Unfortunately, I don't know where she is either," Tgurneu said unpleasantly. "But what have you found out? Whatever it is, it will be useful, no matter how small. Do you have any clues about Nashetania's location?"

"Wait a minute. You can't just continue the conversation as you want. Explain your situation first. Why are you following Nashetania?" Adlet asked.

Tgurneu shrugged as if to say that it was troublesome.



"Fremy, did you tell them the specifics regarding myself, Cargikk, and Dozzu?" Tgurneu asked and Fremy nodded.

Fremy had told them that the Kyoma were separated into three factions: Tgurneu, Cargikk, and Dozzu's sides, which all opposed one another. Tgurneu and Cargikk's opinions concerning the way the Kyoma ought to be were different. And Dozzu was called the Kyoma traitor, currently being hunted by the other two factions.

"As I said before, Nashetania is under Dozzu's control," Tgurneu then began to explain. "About 200 years ago Dozzu betrayed us. He took his pawns with him, left the Wailing Demon Territory, and hid within the human world. Cargikk and I sent our underlings into the human world to hunt them while we continued to eliminate those with allegiances to Dozzu still within the Wailing Demon Territory. I believed that Dozzu's faction had been wiped out."

"...But you're saying that you were mistaken."

"I was soft. Dozzu's side continued to act without me knowing at all. They acquired a fake crest through a means different from my own. And they had sneaked into the Piena Royal Palace and drew Nashetania to their side. Then they gave Nashetania the fake crest and she infiltrated your group."

Adlet simply couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"At the exact same time I also acquired a fake crest. Then I gave it to a human pawn and made them slip into your ranks. It is an unimaginable coincidence. Both

Dozzu and I, while mutually unaware of the other, had been plotting the same strategy."

*Was it really a coincidence?* Adlet wondered.

"I was shocked when I found out there had been an impostor Flower within the Illusion Fog Barrier. I couldn't believe that they had willingly tried to kill you all without my knowledge. I'm ashamed to say I didn't realize that all of it had been Dozzu's doing until after that battle."

Tgurneu continued, "I too had slipped a pawn into the kingdom of Piena. I made them find out Nashetania's weak points, her habits, and her background. I thought that she would be chosen as one of the Six Flowers long before the Majin had awoken. And I believed that just like I had skillfully done with Mora, I might be able to use her.

"However, I completely wasn't able to guess the fact that she had joined forces with Dozzu."

"...I don't believe it," Fremy muttered.

Tgurneu planted the white flag into the ground and crossed his arms.

"Frankly, I can't believe it either," Tgurneu said. "For two Kyoma to be plotting the same plan; is such a coincidence like this likely?"

It didn't seem as if Nashetania becoming a Kyoma's underling was anything other than a joke. And yet it is the truth."

"Adlet, do you believe his story?" Fremy asked him.

Adlet didn't respond; he just urged Tgurneu to continue talking. Adlet didn't believe him either, but he felt like he should hear what Tgurneu had to say.

"Continue, Tgurneu. We'll decide later whether to join forces with you or not," Adlet said and Tgurneu shrugged as if bored.

"I've said it clearly before, but all of you and I are enemies to the bitter end. Honestly speaking, I don't want to join forces with you," Tgurneu said.

"Do you think that's a unique opinion? I feel the same way," Adlet replied.

"But I see Dozzu and Nashetania as more powerful enemies. So in the end, even if I have to save all of you, I would still prefer to eliminate Dozzu and those with him."

"What are you saying?" Adlet flared up in anger. Tgurneu's words were humiliating.

"It's only natural, don't you think? It's not like any of you have posed any real threat to me up till now, right?"

Anger burned in Fremy's eye.

"Dozzu's plan has stretched out further than I thought. A great number of his underlings have infiltrated the ranks of both my pawns and Cargikk's followers. Didn't you see a lot of Kyoma corpses along the way?"

Adlet nodded.

"As you and I went around fighting with Mora, and as you were chasing each other through the forest in the Illusion Fog Barrier, Dozzu was steadily able to continue his preparations. Then this morning he initiated his plan. All at once the Kyoma on Dozzu's side came and attacked my pawns and I.

"The attack from Dozzu's side nearly decimated my pawns in the Forest of Severed Fingers. And it doesn't look like any reinforcements will arrive. At the moment I'm unable to even comprehend who among my pawns is on Dozzu's side," Tgurneu said in a sad tone.

"I have become all alone."

*If that were so then this was the ideal chance to kill Tgurneu.* Adlet seriously considered whether or not to kill Tgurneu there. But Tgurneu's words didn't seem genuine. Tgurneu might have been pretending to be alone just as a trap.

"So, what do you plan on doing now?" Adlet asked.

Then Tgurneu said something that was hard to believe.

"Isn't it obvious? I will kill Nashetania and save Chamo."

"Save Chamo?" Adlet and the others asked in surprise.

"There is a reason. A reason why Dozzu has to kill Chamo now."

"...And that is?"

"Cargikk, Dozzu, and I are competing over which one of us can kill the most Heroes of the Six Flowers. Whichever one of us kills three Flowers first will become the victor. The remaining two will then be forced to obey the winner."

"You said you're competing?"

"Two hundred years ago we used the Saint of Words to negotiate a single contract. It was a simple contract. Whoever kills three of the Heroes first will be able to make the other two powerless. The purpose was so that only one Kyoma would rule over the others. We all pledged to permanently obey the winner and our lives would be forfeit if we were to break that promise.

"Of course even if it was Nashetania that killed you, it would still be added to Dozzu's score. And presumably Dozzu's plan was to cause all of you to split apart. So it's possible that if you were to lose your lives after being separated by Dozzu's plan the points would also go to him."

At that point Rolonia groaned. "A competition...points...it's just like a..."

Tgurneu's beak shook and in a scornful laugh he said, "You understand well, Rolonia. That's exactly right. This is not a fight between all of you and me. It is between me, Cargikk, and Dozzu. The three of us are going around fighting to see who will get the position of command. All of you are no more than pawns that we use in our game."

"Stop screwing around!" Adlet said. Fremy's body was shaking with rage and Rolonia's eyes were wide open in shock. Adlet was barely able to contain his humiliation.

"So have I convinced you? That is the reason why I am allying myself with all of you. To be more clear, Dozzu has an overwhelming advantage at the moment. And if things continue as they are Chamo will die.

Also, Dozzu might be preparing a plan to kill another of the Flowers. So I think that even for you there are no longer any other choices left but to join forces with me."

"Ad-kun, what should we do? Are we really going to...?" Rolonia said.

"Let's make a pact. Until we eliminate Dozzu, I will not attack any of you. I'm also ordering the seventh that I infiltrated into your ranks to do everything they can to help in Chamo's rescue. I haven't even once gotten in your way, have I?"

"What Kyoma is targeting Chamo?" Fremy asked.

"Someone on Dozzu's side. Even though until yesterday they were my followers."

"...Give us a little bit of time to think," Adlet said.

He didn't think that everything Tgurneu had said was the truth. But at the same time he couldn't consider all of it to be a lie. Lying from the beginning until the end was the act of a fool. Lies only functioned so well when they were interspersed among the truth. Parts of what Tgurneu was telling them had to be true.

But Adlet wasn't able to discern just where the truth ended and the lies began.

"There's something that doesn't make sense, Tgurneu," Fremy said. "Why did you agree that the one who killed three Heroes would rule over the Kyoma? Aren't you, Cargikk, and Dozzu mutual enemies?" Fremy said and for a moment Tgurneu seemed flustered.

He then turned his eyes away from Fremy and said, "...I wonder if it was the indiscretion of youth. Back then I was a fool. I didn't imagine that Dozzu was that much of a coward."

"Don't dodge the question."

"Fremy, we've already talked for a long time. I don't think there is much time left for all of us."

"...You're right."

Adlet was sure that Fremy wanted to cross-examine Tgurneu in more detail, but Tgurneu was correct.

"Well, what should we do? Decide for us, Adlet," Tgurneu said, pressing Adlet for an answer.

But Adlet just continued to think silently. *Is it true that the traitor Dozzu and Tgurneu opposed one another? If it's false then that means Fremy is a liar. But that can't be*, Adlet thought. Fremy was a precious companion.



It was likely that the very existence of Dozzu was a lie. So far they had not encountered Dozzu even once. There was a sufficient possibility that Tgurneu created a fictitious enemy and was pretending to be the Heroes' ally so that he could get close to them.

However, Adlet and the others had seen the Kyoma corpses earlier. They had seen traces of the fight Nashetania and some other individual had with the Kyoma. It seemed roughly apparent that there was some kind of internal turmoil among the Kyoma. And there was a high probability that Dozzu actually existed.

*So what about Nashetania? Is it true that she was not working for Tgurneu and is actually one of Dozzu's followers?*

"Adlet, our chance of victory will slip away if you take so long a time making decisions."

"Be quiet, Tgurneu. Or do you want to die here?" Fremy threatened.

Adlet, however, continued to think. There was a clear contradiction in Tgurneu's words.

*Nashetania and the seventh that Tgurneu had placed among the Heroes were in opposition. And Tgurneu said the seventh would do everything in their power to help with Chamo's rescue. So if that were the case, then who is Goldof and what role did he play in this situation?*

After a long silence from Adlet, he began to speak. "Tgurneu. I'm thinking that joining forces with you wouldn't be the worst idea."

"Are you serious? Ad-kun?"

"What foolishness is this?!"

Both Fremy and Rolonia were dumbfounded. But Adlet ignored them and continued.

"But I still haven't heard the most important thing. Is Goldof working for you?"

"Right, that is the question," Tgurneu said, stroking his beak. "I do know one thing. Goldof is not the seventh I sent. That is the only thing I know."

"...In other words?"

"I don't know what Goldof's true identity is, either. Up until now I had thought that he was a genuine Hero of the Six Flowers. Just why Nashetania views him as her loyal vassal has not been revealed to me. That is a mystery."

Tgurneu paused for a moment before continuing. "There are three possibilities I can think of. The first is that Goldof is another impostor sent by Dozzu. If that's the case then I don't know where the other Hero of the Six Flowers could be.

The second possibility is that he is a genuine Flower, but for some reason he is being manipulated by Dozzu. I think this is the most probable scenario."

*That's not it*, Adlet thought. The Goldof he had fought before didn't seem like he was being controlled. He was fighting them under his own will.

"The third possibility is that he is a genuine Hero, but he has betrayed all of you in order to protect Nashetania."

"That last idea isn't true," Adlet said.

Goldof was not betraying the Heroes. If he didn't have the unwavering will to trade his life in order to kill the Majin then he wouldn't have been chosen to be one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers in the first place.

"Do you think that is unlikely? Mora betrayed you all once."

"But Mora..."

"Everything is doubtful, Adlet. Our fight is full of unlikely things," Tgurneu cut him off. Adlet wasn't able to come up with a good response and fell silent.

"Anyhow, it's probably not mistaken to view Goldof as the key to this fight. Who is he and whose will is he moving under?"

"...'I'm going to protect the princess.' That is what Goldof said," Fremy said and Tgurneu's beak shook. It appeared as if he were laughing bitterly.

"We are in a precarious situation at the moment. Hans and Mora are confined to their locations and can't move. And it doesn't seem like that giant fool Cargikk is going to make a move at this time. So why in the world does Goldof think he needs to protect the princess?"

"Tgurneu, do you have any clues about where Nashetania hid?" Adlet asked, but Tgurneu shook his head.

"Well, my pawns went on the lookout for Nashetania and Goldof. And after you all fought, Nashetania, Goldof, and Dozzu met up with one another."

"What kind of Kyoma is Dozzu?"

"He has the power to wield lightning and can freely change his form. Now he has the strange appearance of something like a cross between a dog and a squirrel. Though it must have been 200 years since I last saw him, there doesn't exist another Kyoma that can use lightning so I'm sure Dozzu is here."

"So?"

"There was a basin about a kilometer east from here. My pawns followed them there, but two of them were killed all of a sudden and one of them got away."

Then several minutes later only Goldof exited the basin and went even farther east. When the last Kyoma peaked into the basin again they couldn't find Nashetania. She had disappeared without a trace."

"So that must mean Nashetania was somehow able to hide herself, right?"

"That's a difficult question..."

Rolonia stared uncomfortably as Adlet and Tgurneu talked with one another. Her eyes seemed to be complaining, *Do you really intend on joining forces with him?*

"Perhaps it isn't a Kyoma ability."

"What do you mean?"

"I command approximately 4000 pawns, yet even I haven't seen a Kyoma with the ability to make a single human vanish without leaving any traces behind. Rather, I think it's impossible for them to exist. Fremy, do you think the same?"

Fremy didn't respond, but she didn't deny it.

"Well then, could she be hiding the power of a Saint? It seems unlikely. Nashetania is the Saint of Blades. No matter how she uses that power, she can't hide her body."

"That's the problem."

Adlet and Tgurneu went quiet. Fremy looked at Adlet and her eyes seemed to be asking, *just how long are you going to continue talking?* They also seemed to ask if it were okay to kill Tgurneu. Adlet whispered for her to wait.

"...About 400 hundred years ago, it is said that the Piena kingdom of the time made Saints create unique Saint Instruments," Tgurneu said. "Those Saint Instruments were passed down from king to king generation after generation. It is said that they were given to the royal family as a demonstration of the Saints' abilities and loyalty. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to determine who is in possession of those instruments or what kind of power they have. Perhaps there is one that can hide a person, and maybe Goldof or Nashetania is using it."

Saint Instruments were tools imbued with the power of the gods. Adlet wondered if Mora knew something about them.

"Do you have any proof?" Fremy asked.

"No, but I can't see any other possibility." Tgurneu suddenly started walking. "We have no time to stand around and talk. Let's go find Nashetania."

Adlet then followed behind him and Rolonia also went along.

"How do you plan on finding her?"

"First, we'll head to the last place my pawns spotted Nashetania in and then we'll look for clues there."

"Seriously? Ad-kun, are you really going to work with Tgurneu?" Rolonia asked, clearly upset.

Adlet turned around and replied, "Don't worry. Just be quiet and come along."

Rolonia seemed to have a face that said she couldn't believe what was happening. But Fremy was quiet and composed. *Of course you'd be calm*, Adlet thought. And even without saying anything she seemed to understand what Adlet was thinking.

"If we can't find any clues then we'll search for Goldof. He surely knows about Nashetania's location, don't you think? After that..."

Tgurneu stopped halfway in his sentence. Something tumbled towards Tgurneu's feet. It was one of Fremy's explosives. Right before it exploded Adlet moved. He took out his sword and leaped to the side.

Caught off guard, Tgurneu was not able to defend himself completely. He protected his face with both of his hands and couldn't do anything other than jump back as the explosion flung him backwards. Adlet then rushed towards him and swung his sword at the Kyoma.

"If that's all you have to tell us then our business is done."

"You bastards!"

Tgurneu stopped Adlet's sword with his arm, the blade going halfway into his limb before stopping. His skin was extremely tough and his muscles were resilient. Tgurneu then lunged at Adlet's stomach with his fists, but Adlet bent his body and twisted around to Tgurneu's back. He then wrapped both of his hands around Tgurneu's throat and began to strangle him.

The next instant one of Fremy's bullets pierced Tgurneu's chest. Tgurneu as well as Adlet, who was restraining him, tumbled to the ground. *This Tgurneu is far weaker than the one we faced in the Valley of Spilled Blood*, Adlet thought.

"Rolonia! Run to the right! Surround Tgurneu!"

"Ri, Right."

Fremy and Rolonia ran to the left and right respectively.

"Are you an idiot Adlet?!" Tgurneu shouted as he tried to shake Adlet off. "Don't you understand that I'm not lying?!"

Adlet grinned. "Even if I assume that everything is true, that's not a reason to let you live."



"...You'll regret this."

Fremy's bullets broke Tgurneu's knees, and Rolonia's whip squeezed out all the blood from his body. The instant that Tgurneu stopped moving Adlet took out his trump card. It was a weapon that caused certain death for all Kyoma, the Nail of the Saints. Tgurneu's true form was that of a fig fruit, so he found it and then tried to stab the nail through it.

At that moment a strange change occurred in Tgurneu's body. His neck suddenly extended and with a loud snap his head ripped off.

The crow's head and the yeti's body separated, with the yeti's body falling to the ground lifeless and the head growing wings. Then with unbelievable speed it flew up into the sky.

"Fremy! Shoot him down!" Adlet shouted, gripping the Nail of the Saints in his left hand and throwing a poison dart with his right hand.

Fremy then shot her rifle. Although the crow was able to dodge the bullet, Adlet's poison dart hit him square on. The crow lost its balance in midair and it desperately flapped its wings in an attempt to escape.

"Its real body is the head!"

Adlet then threw the Nail of the Saints, but Tgurneu just barely managed to dodge it. The nail slightly grazed its wings as it sailed through the air.

"Co, come, someone! Come you dimwits!" Tgurneu shouted, but there was no response. "Shit, is no one going to come?! You dimwitted fools!"

Adlet's darts could no longer reach him. Fremy continued to fire rapidly, but though a number of bullets grazed him, none of them shot him down. And eventually Tgurneu had flown far enough away that he seemed to disappear into the distance.

"...Shit!"

Adlet pounded the ground as he stared after Tgurneu. Due to the ground's heat the sweat on his hands turned into steam and floated upwards from his fists. They had missed their best opportunity to kill Tgurneu.

After that Adlet went and picked up the Nail of the Saints he had thrown. He only had three of them left, so he had to treat them with care.

"Good. I thought you were really going to join forces with Tgurneu," Rolonia said, relieved after Adlet returned from finding the nail.

"Of course. The enemy of an enemy is not our friend."

"But, what was with him? He was more pathetic than I thought," Rolonia said, staring off towards where Tgurneu had disappeared.

"It was all an act. He was just acting like that in order to make us grow careless and drop our guard," Fremy said.

"So Adlet, what do you think about what Tgurneu had said?"

"I don't know. I feel like all of it was a lie, and at the same time I feel like it was mingled with truth. But I know that at the very least he wasn't planning on teaming up with us. He was just searching for an opportunity to kill us."

"That....I vaguely got the same impression," Rolonia said.

"There's no need to think about it," Fremy said. "Anything and everything Tgurneu says is a lie. The impostor Flowers are Nashetania and Goldof. Tgurneu is the one behind the curtains. Tgurneu came to us and said that he wanted to join forces in order to throw us off our guard. Dozzu's not related to this."

"It's natural to think that," Adlet replied.

"There's no way that two Kyoma could happen to work out the same strategy separately," Fremy said.

"But if he wanted to kill us he wouldn't have needed to come alone. He could have just sent all his forces this way. So at the very least Tgurneu had a reason for not sending his underlings. Perhaps the majority of what he said was true."

"From what part to what part?" Rolonia asked, but Adlet met her question with silence.

It was certain that something complex was going on among the Kyoma, but Adlet wondered who opposed whom and for what reason.

Was Nashetania really an assassin sent by Dozzu or was she working with Tgurneu after all? Who was Goldof? Was he Tgurneu's underling or Dozzu's? Or could he perhaps be a genuine flower? There were so many things that he did not understand.

However, if he remained confused they would not be able to achieve victory. So they needed to discern what to prioritize and what to put off, and then act accordingly.

"Kill Nashetania and save Chamo. And then we should know what is true."

Fremy and Rolonia nodded. Then they descended the rocky hill and once again began to run.

### Chapter Three: Part Two

Adlet, Rolonia, and Fremy resumed their search for Nashetania. First, they raided the basin where Tgurneu said Nashetania had disappeared.

Adlet and Fremy had already checked it once before. It was where the two Kyoma had been charred into corpses by lightning. Holes were also present in the ground Nashetania had used the power of blades. Other than those, there was nothing else in sight.

The three carefully searched the ground, then looked over the surrounding area. However, they weren't able to find anything that resembled a clue. Rolonia even licked the ground, but she wasn't able to determine anything from the Kyoma's blood.

"There's nothing here," Fremy said, displeased. "There are just the Kyoma corpses, right?"

"So Tgurneu was trying to deceive us after all. That's obvious now."

Tgurneu's words reverberated in the back of Adlet's mind. Nashetania wasn't being hidden by a Kyoma's ability but with the power of a Saint Instrument that Goldof possessed. *But should I believe those words?*

"Let's split up into two groups. I will try and ask Mora about the Saint Instruments and find out which ones were handed down to the Piena Royal Family. And if it really is a Saint Instrument that we're dealing with, then I'll find out how we can break the effect. Meanwhile, you two will search the places where Nashetania could be hiding," Adlet said.

"But, where..." Rolonia said.

"She's probably underground. There is no other possibility," Fremy said.

"How should we search the ground? If only we could use Chamo-san's power..."

"It's okay, Rolonia. I'll find it," Fremy said, producing a bomb in her hand. Unlike her other explosives, this one was in the shape of a thin nail. She then threw it below, the bomb slipping between the gaps of the rocks and finally stabbing the very bottom. Then an explosive sound rang through the air as chunks of the rocky hill were gouged out and blown to pieces.

"If she is hiding in the ground then this will be convenient. I will scour the ground one by one with these explosives. And after I have buried her alive she will be tortured to death."

"Wait a second, are there no other options?"

"Other options...right. Rolonia said that there are Kyoma prowling near Chamo's location. She might be in one of their stomachs."

In the Illusion Fog Barrier, Nashetania had hidden Leura, the Saint of the Sun, within the stomach of a Kyoma.

"We can't kill all of the Kyoma within the effective range of the blade gem and rip open their stomachs. Are there any other places she could be hiding?"

The three of them continued to think. Nashetania's tactics were unconventional, so it was unlikely that they would be able to figure them out easily.

They put forward various suggestions: She could have captured a flying Kyoma and flown about the air at a kilometer distance. She could be using the power of a metamorphosis Kyoma to transform into a rock. She could be underground, she could be inside a Kyoma's stomach, or she could be using the power of a Saint Instrument. But those were the only possibilities they could come up with.

"That's enough thinking. Let's move. If we think of something else we'll tell each other."

"Right. First we'll search for tunnels underground, and at the same time we'll kill all the Kyoma nearby and rip their stomachs open. It's up to us," Adlet said.

"You can rely on us," Fremy replied. "An hour should be enough for an area like this."

Again a number of bombs appeared in Fremy's hand before she chucked them into the rocky hill. Along with a thunderous roar, a cloud of dirt rose up into the air. Then one of the rocky hills began to collapse. Geysers erupted everywhere and the area became enveloped in steam.

"Rolonia, pierce the ground with your whip. Tell me immediately if you find anything."

"Ri, right."

Adlet figured the two of them would be alright by themselves. And if Nashetania were actually hiding in the ground then they would definitely be able to find her. So Adlet decided to search for the Saint Instrument that Goldof might have.

Only two hours remained until Chamo's expected death. They had to hurry.

#

The lava belt suddenly grew noisy. After hearing several of Fremy's explosions go off, Adlet finally reached the other basin where Chamo was.



About 20 Kyoma prowled around the surrounding area. It looked like they had separated into groups of five, neither fighting nor running, but simply watching Chamo and the others. Meanwhile, Hans had been fighting with several Kyoma inside the basin. And with Chamo clinging to her, Mora was protecting her from the Kyoma's attacks.

Adlet went and helped Hans disperse the Kyoma. After the Kyoma scattered in all directions like tiny spiders, Adlet was easily able to explain the situation to Mora, Hans, and Chamo.

"You're saying...Tgurneu wanted to ally with you?"

"Dozzu, meow. Once again the things we don't know have increased, meow. But is it true?"

Mora gripped her head and Hans tilted his head to the side.

"The Saint Instruments are more important right now. Mora, do you know anything about them?" Adlet asked.

"If it's a power that can conceal a person, then it must be the power of the Saint of Illusions. But..." Mora frowned and shook her head. "There definitely should be a record at the Head Temple if a Saint Instrument was made. That is our job at the Head Temple. There was a Saint Instrument given to the Piena King in the past but a Saint Instrument that allows a person to disappear has not been produced. Don't you think a Saint Instrument that would allow its user to freely make their

body disappear would be used for assassinations, gathering secret intelligence, and be abused as much as the user wanted?"

"So does that mean what Tgurneu said was a lie after all?" Adlet asked

"Umeow. That's not entirely the case," Hans said. "The Saints are human. There are times when they can be enticed by money and times when they could be convinced to go against authority. Or maybe they were persuaded by love, meow. It's not strange for something like this to happen in secret, even at the Head Temple."

Mora didn't deny that possibility. *This again*, Adlet thought. Once again there were possibilities but they had no proof. That seemed to be the only kind of information they could ever accumulate.

"Is there a way to break the effect of a Saint Instrument if Nashetania or Goldof has one?"

"...There is." Mora stroked Chamo's back as she clung to her chest. Then she laid Chamo on the ground and stood directly in front of Adlet.

"If a Saint Instrument has been used, then remnants of its energy will remain, and there is a way to sense those. Successive Temple Heads have passed on the technique generation after generation. And with little time you could use it too."

Mora then glanced at Chamo.

"It will take time. Chamo, hold out until then."

On her side, Chamo lifted her head slightly. She then nodded as if to say it was okay. Mora then closed her eyes and began to chant an incantation.

About ten minutes after that, Mora touched Adlet's face as she continued to chant. Her thumbs touched Adlet's eyes and a sensation of something warm poured into his body.

"...Did it work?" Adlet asked right before Mora staggered to the side.

However, she soon picked Chamo back up, placed her hand back on her back, and resumed pouring energy into her body.

"So how did it go, meow?" Hans asked.

It didn't take long for Adlet to realize that he could see things now that he couldn't perceive before. He could see a light in Chamo's stomach, which was probably the power of the Blade Gem that Nashetania had inserted into her. There was also the same kind of light on the back of his hand and on Mora's back, the same places where they had their crests. That was the power of the Saint of the Single Flower.

"The places where the light is shining are the places where the Saint Instruments are being used. If you can see a faint haze, that means a Saint Instrument had been used in that place a little while ago. The effect lasts for about three hours..."

Halfway through her explanation Mora grimaced and touched her forehead. She was exhausted.

"...But you are only borrowing this power, so you won't be able to completely see all the remnants of the Saint Instruments. Perhaps only faint traces will appear before you."

"I'm uncomfortable about this, meow."

"Well, at any rate you'll undoubtedly be able to catch the remnants of such a powerful Saint Instrument that can make a person disappear. Now go, Adlet. There isn't any time."

"Wait a sec, meow. Did you check Goldof with that power?"

"I did, but I wasn't able to see anything. This power is simply ineffective unless a Saint Instrument is in use."

Hans shrugged.

"I'm going to return to searching for Nashetania," Adlet explained. "I will leave this place in both of your hands. And if you are spotted by a Kyoma you must kill it and rip its stomach open. Nashetania could be hiding inside their bodies."

"Understood. Now go, Adlet."

Mora urged Adlet to leave, but before he left Adlet went closer to Chamo. Her body was curled up and her face was pale as she clung to the center of Mora's chest. Within just a few hours her face had grown haggard. It was a heartbreaking sight.

"Nashetania is cornered. Don't worry."

"Ehehe, right. What are you saying? Chamo is completely okay."

"..." Adlet didn't know how to respond.

"What, you look worried. Chamo is strong. That's why Chamo is fine."

Adlet wordlessly caressed Chamo's head. Then he ran out of the basin.

#

Adlet continued to run through the lava belt. The ground was shaking slightly from Fremy's bombings.

After climbing to the top of a rocky hill, he used the power Mora had given him to check the area. However, he didn't find anything. Feeling despair, Adlet continued to run.

He scaled up hills, then descended them, climbed up to the top, then came back down again, repeating the process over and over. Eventually he made his way back to Fremy and Rolonia as Fremy continued to bomb the ground.

"Ad-kun! How was it over there?!"

"I borrowed an ability to search for the Saint Instruments from Mora. Leave this area to me," Adlet shouted back to Rolonia.

"You're interfering, Adlet!" Fremy shouted, about to throw a bomb near him.

With a start, Adlet ran. He continued along the area of the lava belt that Fremy had already bombed. With the crumbling of the rocky hills he could see the area much better than before. But at the same time the ground beneath him seemed to crumble the moment he set foot on the ground, making it difficult to run.

The dramatic change of the terrain should have rendered whoever was within the ground helpless.

Even if they were able to withstand the bombings they probably would not be able to continue to hide. And even if they were luckily able to conceal themselves they would most likely leave some kind of trace. Plus, they wouldn't be able to dig over several dozen meters downward because they would run into magma and the underground water currents.

Adlet increased his speed, and after a while he spotted what he was looking for. Squinting, he could see a faint haze of light among wisps of vapor and smoke. It was far dimmer than the light he'd seen in Chamo's stomach.

Adlet approached the light haze. The area was the same spot Tgurneu had said where Goldof, Nashetania, and Dozzu had disappeared.

He looked over the surroundings, but he couldn't find a place where the light shone brightly. At the moment, no Saint Instruments were in use. There was only the faint trace of energy from when the Saint Instrument had been used before. Adlet then dug into the ground and carefully examined the area, but he didn't find Nashetania nor any clues about her location.

But there was one thing he clearly understood: either Goldof or Nashetania had a Saint Instrument, and they were using it.

Adlet left the area and continued to search for Nashetania. He didn't think there was any reason why he shouldn't be able to find her. If Nashetania had been using a hiding place that couldn't be found by any means, then she would have hidden there immediately after activating the Blade Gem. But she decided to fight with Adlet and the others before eventually getting away.

In other words Nashetania had decided to run away from the battle with Adlet and the others and hide out of necessity. So Adlet guessed it was possible to find her.

Adlet had already searched more than two-thirds of the effective range of the Blade Gem, and Fremy had already reduced two-thirds of the effective area to rubble. So even if Nashetania were hiding within the ground or even if she were using the power of a Saint Instrument, they should be close to finding her.

It also seemed unlikely that she was hiding and moving secretly at the same time. He should have been able to find some trace left by the Saint Instrument or a tunnel under the ground, or something.

*Don't rush*, Adlet thought as he continued to search. Little by little Chamo's time continued to fade.

#

Meanwhile, Fremy and Rolonia were at the basin with Chamo. After launching explosives into the trapezoid hill, the ground started to break. A big hole opened up in the rocky hill and magma bubbled up from under the ground.

But there were no Kyoma in the area. Rolonia, Fremy, and Hans had destroyed them all.



"There's nothing here either?" Fremy muttered as she lifted her head up from the ground.

Though they had searched the holes she had made in the ground, Nashetania was nowhere to be found. And they couldn't find any evidence that Nashetania had dug a hole in the ground herself.

As she stared at her confused companions, Mora continued to pour energy into Chamo who was resting in her arms. Chamo had already lost the energy to bluff about her condition. And Mora no longer had any idea just when she might die.

"Fremy, it's useless to keep searching under the ground. Nashetania is not there," Hans said.

"...But there are still places we haven't searched yet. We might have missed her. She could have also used some kind of special technique after hiding underground."

Hans shook his head. "Stop. If she were in the ground then the enemy would have come to stop you. Since they aren't coming that must mean we are off the mark."

Hearing that, Fremy ground her teeth in frustration.

"Calm down, meow. At the very least it is clear that she is not underground. Even if that's everything we've found out, it's still results."

"But if she is not underground then where is she hiding? We haven't had contact from Ad-kun, so what should we do?" Rolonia asked.

"It's Goldof. He has a Saint Instrument after all and he is using it to hide her," Mora said.

"If that's the case then Adlet should have found that out," Fremy countered.

"Let's think about this again from the beginning. Somehow Tgurneu is fooling you, meow. So forget everything he said and reevaluate the information!"

"That's meaningless. No matter how Tgurneu may be deceiving us, what's certain is that Nashetania is within this one-kilometer area."

"So it's a Kyoma ability after all. There must be a Kyoma that Fremy-san and Ad-kun don't know about. And she must be hiding using that ability...."

The three of them shouted at one another, but they were unable to settle their debate. Eventually Chamo vomited blood again which brought an end to their argument.

"Meow, Mora. It looks like we really can't move Chamo, huh?"

"It's impossible. She wouldn't be able to handle just moving a hundred meters," Mora replied.

"...I will go search for Nashetania too. We aren't going to settle anything like this," Hans declared.

"It seems like that has become the only thing we can do."

Even though they had eliminated all the Kyoma in the area, there was still a possibility that the enemy could come down upon them. And if Hans weren't there then they might not be able to defend themselves. Nevertheless, Mora nodded.

"Go. I will protect Chamo, even if I have to give up my life to do so."

"You do that, meow. Chamo is far more important militarily than you are, meow."

"...You can be quite blunt, but that's good. And you're exactly right."

"You can't do that," a voice called to them from outside the basin.

They couldn't tell whether it was male or female from the voice, but soon a small animal appeared, slowly walking towards them through the cracks of the broken rocks. It had a strange appearance, like a mix between a squirrel and a dog, and it didn't seem like a Kyoma at all. But sure enough it did have a horn on its head.

"Please wait a bit more before searching for Nashetania."

"Do you know this Kyoma, Fremy?" Mora asked.

The moment Mora looked at it she could sense its power. It was the same aura she felt when she had faced Tgurneu before, and even Hans. The Kyoma before them was powerful.

Though they didn't know why, the Kyoma's entire body was covered in injuries. There were giant gashes on its head and on its stomach. Even so, Mora got the hunch that it would not be easy to kill him.

"I've seen him once," Fremy said. "He was here at the lava belt years ago. Tgurneu had called him Dozzu."

"That's right. My name is Dozzu. I heard you treated my comrades very well in the Illusion Fog Barrier," Dozzu said and then sparks appeared around his horn.

He was the Kyoma traitor. If Tgurneu's words were to be believed then he was the mastermind behind the battle in the Illusion Fog Barrier. Tension ran through Mora's body.

"By the way, I heard that you met Tgurneu. May I ask what you talked about? I'd appreciate it if you could let me know."

"No, meow," Hans said and then pointed towards Fremy and Rolonia, indicating for them to go.

"Hans, will you be alright alone?"

"Worry about Chamo more, meow."

Hans smiled as Fremy and Rolonia retreated, scaling back over the crumbling rocky hill. But Dozzu ignored them.

"Meohi? You're going to let them go, meow? Didn't you come to stop us?"

"Stopping you will be enough, Hans-san. Nashetania said that you are a more formidable opponent than Adlet or Chamo."

"Meomeow. Princess-san has a good eye, meow," Hans said, cold sweat forming on his forehead.

"Do you need backup, Hans?" Mora asked.

"Umeow, I'm okay. You continue to protect Chamo." Hans readied his sword.

"I think it will be better if we distance ourselves. Even for you Hans-san, involving Chamo-san is probably not your intent, right?"

Hans glanced briefly at Chamo.

"I will do that, meow. You are quite the sensible Kyoma."

"Not really."

"More importantly, are you alright fighting with your injuries, meow?"

"Thank you for your kind concern, but you do not need to worry."

Mora silently watched Hans and Dozzu walk away together. Soon Hans crouched down and took a battle position. At the same time sparks emanated from around Dozzu's horn.

"Well then, shall we begin, Hans-san?"

And then the battle started.

#

"...What's going on here?" Adlet asked as he sat atop one of the broken rocks. He had already finished searching everywhere within the Blade Gem's range.

The only place where there were traces of Saint Instrument use was in the single small basin Tgurneu had indicated. But that was in the past. At the moment he couldn't find any traces of a Saint Instrument currently being used.

*Was Nashetania really hiding with the power of a Saint Instrument? Even though it had been used only once a little while ago, was the Saint Instrument still concealing her body?* If Mora's words were to be believed, then the existence of such a Saint Instrument was unlikely.

Adlet looked over his surroundings. Thanks to Fremy's bombings, his view of the area had vastly improved. Now only sparse short hills were in sight. Still, Adlet was not able to find Nashetania or Goldof.

*Is Tgurneu tricking us? If so, then what is he using and how is he doing it?* Adlet recalled what Tgurneu had said but he couldn't figure it out. Tgurneu mostly spoke about Dozzu and didn't say much regarding Nashetania's whereabouts.

*If Nashetania was not hiding with the power of a Saint Instrument, then she was probably using the ability of a Kyoma. But if that were the case, then what in the world was the Saint Instrument that had been used here?*

Adlet could faintly feel his resolve waver. He tried not to think about how he was failing to uncover the truth or even find any clues.

*I'm overlooking something. There's just something I'm not seeing. If I could just find the start of the thread, I should be able to solve everything,* Adlet thought right before Fremy and Rolonia came running from Chamo's basin.

"Fremy! Rolonia! Did you find them?" Adlet shouted. But there was no need to ask. If they had found Nashetania or Goldof then they would have already contacted him with the firecrackers.

"We've got trouble. Dozzu came! Now he's fighting with Hans!"

"What?"

Fremy and Rolonia then proceeded to explain the situation to Adlet. *The situation has gotten even worse,* Adlet realized. But they couldn't back Hans up. They had no choice but to rely on Hans to take care of Dozzu.

"What should we do, Ad-kun? How much time do we have left?" Rolonia asked, flustered.



"...It's Goldof. He's the key to this. I can't think of any other possibility."

However, he still had not found Nashetania or Goldof.

As Adlet puzzled over the situation, Rolonia said, "Speaking of Goldof-san, we saw him once."

Adlet stared at Rolonia as Fremy went into more detail.

"Sorry we were a bit slow telling you this. We saw Goldof about thirty minutes ago. He was to the northwest at the edge of the effective range. I tried to kill him, but he got away."

"Where did he run to?"

"Outside the range. The terrain got rough and we lost him."

Adlet was at a loss for words. *Goldof should have been fighting in order to protect Nashetania. So then why did he run? Why didn't he fight with Fremy or Rolonia? And why didn't he go to kill Chamo along with Dozzu?*

Suddenly an explosion rang about fifteen meters to the side of Adlet's location. Subconsciously, Adlet moved into a battle stance.

However, it was just boiling water spewing out from the ground. Because Fremy had broken the ground, the magma and the water currents underground were becoming unstable.

"Shit, that surprised me."

"Let's hurry up and go," Fremy urged and Adlet started to run.

While they ran Adlet thought about Goldof. *What is his role in this battle? He came along to the lava belt, then he appeared before us once and then he prevented us from killing Nashetania. And if he had a Saint Instrument then for some reason he had used it once.*

*But that's all Goldof had done. If his objective was to kill the Six Flowers then there were a number of other things that he could have done. He could have obstructed our search and he could have directly gone and killed Chamo.*

Adlet couldn't understand him. *Who in the world is he?*

Tgurneu, Dozzu, Nashetania, and Goldof. Various enemies were all jumbled together within the lava belt. And something was going on that Adlet just couldn't figure out.

"...Shit!" Adlet bellowed subconsciously. He didn't have time to speculate about the situation they were in. For now finding Goldof was the number one task. He couldn't do anything more than that.

Only 45 minutes remained. If they couldn't find Goldof then it might be the end for all of them.

#

Mora held her breath in anxiety as she watched over the battle happening fifty meters from her. Hans and Dozzu were fighting to the death.

"Umeow!"

Hans rolled in every direction, tirelessly and constantly changing courses as he dodged the lightning strikes. On the other side Dozzu continued to move and release lightning without treading into Hans' attack range.

From just observing their fight, the bolts of electricity seemed inescapable, yet Hans wasn't hit by a single one. That wasn't due to his reflexes but due to his characteristic predicting prowess. Even so, if his evasion was just a hand's width mistimed then Hans would probably be burned to a crisp.

Mora thought that staying out of the fight was probably the best course of action.

She probably wouldn't even be able to keep up with the two of them if she had joined. Adding her unskilled hands to the battle would become nothing but a hindrance to Hans.

"..."

Mora hugged Chamo's body tightly. She wanted to get Chamo away from the fight, and at the same time she wanted to go search for Nashetania along with Adlet. But at the moment, seeping energy into Chamo as a stopgap was the only thing she could do.

"...Cat-san is fighting hard, huh?" Chamo said. They were the first words she'd uttered in a long time.

"Don't speak, you'll waste your energy," Mora replied, but Chamo didn't hear her.

"Hey, Obachan. It's a little weird to say this, but Chamo is a bit happy."

"What?"

Chamo smiled. "Hey, Chamo is Chamo...so no one has ever worried about Chamo."

"...I see."

"Chamo never thought everyone would try so hard like this for Chamo. Even Fremy is worrying over Chamo. And Chamo thought that Cat-san wouldn't want the burden and would just kill Chamo."

"Is that what you thought?"

Even now Hans was fighting Dozzu with all his strength.

"...Cat-san is a good person, huh?" Chamo said and then she closed her eyes.

It seemed like she clearly understood that she was nearing her limit.

"Move out of the way, meow, you shitty dog!" Hans shouted and sliced at Dozzu.

"That's rude. I am not a dog."

Dozzu released a lightning attack as Hans dodged to the side. It didn't seem like there would ever be an end to their fight.

#

There were still tons of rocky hills outside the effective range of the Blade Gem.

Even if Goldof was just lying low on the ground, discovering him would be difficult. So the three of them split up and spread out over the area to search for him. Fremy and Adlet were at different places near the edge of the effective range while Rolonia headed further out.

After running for about fifteen minutes, Adlet found something strange. The ground was shining faintly. Someone had used a Saint Instrument there, though it was highly unlikely that it had been Nashetania. It must have been Goldof.

"...What is this?" Adlet asked in frustration.

More and more he was becoming confused by the Saint Instrument and Goldof. Perhaps the Saint Instrument in Goldof's possession had no connection to Nashetania's concealment. But if that were true then how was she concealing herself?

The next instant there was a small explosion far away in the sky. The Heroes had already decided that if one of them found Goldof they would immediately contact the others by releasing an explosion into the sky, so Adlet ran as fast as he could towards it.

Along the way he met up with Rolonia and they continued running. The direction they were heading was within the Blade Gem's effective range.

"Why was it inside the range?" Adlet muttered.

When they finally reached the area they soon spotted Fremy running. Then they saw that Goldof was about three hundred meters ahead of her.

And then Adlet finally saw it. Goldof's helmet was glowing faintly. That was the Saint Instrument.

The light emitting from the helmet was extremely weak. It probably only used a small amount of power. But if Adlet could understand the true purpose of that Saint Instrument then he would be able to figure out what was going on.

"...He can't escape, alright?" Adlet announced as he ran and stared at Goldof.

Fremy had managed to pull up near Goldof and was pointing her rifle at him, but Goldof didn't take out his spear to fight them.

"Fremy, be careful!" Adlet shouted. That was when Adlet noticed that Goldof was now at the same basin where they had been fifteen minutes ago.

"Adlet, he's here," Fremy said.

Adlet stood in front of Fremy and readied his sword. Then Goldof quietly spoke. He wasn't looking at Adlet, Rolonia, or Fremy. He was staring at a fragment of a broken boulder, his profile facing them. But his guard was still up and they would not be able to easily launch an attack against him.

"What are you looking at?" Adlet asked.

Goldof didn't reply though. He just silently stared at the boulder. His expression was calm and Adlet knew upon looking at his face that he had the eyes of a person that had seen fiercer battles his entire life.

"What is over there?" Adlet asked, but as expected Goldof didn't answer.

After standing for several seconds, Goldof finally looked to Adlet and the others and spoke. "Did you find the princess?"

"Ah, soon. You've given us a hard time...but that ends here as well."

"...Did you figure out the truth?" Goldof asked, though he didn't move his eyes any further from the boulder.

"Who are you asking? I'm the strongest man in the world."

Goldof seemed to be smiling slightly.

"Tell us. What is the true purpose of that Saint Instrument helmet of yours?" Fremy demanded.



"...Saint Instrument?" Goldof muttered.

"We're going to kill you after this," Fremy said, putting her finger on the trigger of her rifle. "But before we do that we want to hear what you have to say. Is Nashetania being concealed with the power of that Saint Instrument?"

"Asking that is meaningless. Both for myself and for all of you."

Goldof gripped his spear with two hands and Adlet gulped. Adlet understood Goldof's true power. Even if it was three against one, he definitely wouldn't lose. But at the moment there was something else that could surpass the difference in their strength.

"I'm disappointed, Adlet," Goldof said quietly as he stared at Adlet. "I thought that you might be able to notice."

"Notice what?"

"I'll tell you everything once this is over."

Goldof readied his spear as Adlet and the others in turn each readied their own weapons. Rolonia also began to whisper her insults and profanities.

"I will protect the princess," Goldof said. But his next words left Adlet completely dumbfounded. Even Rolonia stopped muttering to herself and Fremy's eyes opened wide.

"And I will also save Chamo."

Goldof then charged straight at Adlet.



### Chapter Four: Part One

Goldof Aurora.

The young boy whose name was known across the world as the young knight prodigy. He was even called the pride of the Piena Kingdom. However, there were not that many people who knew about his background and lineage. His origins were hidden from both the people outside of the kingdom and the citizens within Piena. There were even nobles and people among the knights who didn't know.

Goldof came from the lowest class of citizens within the Piena Kingdom. He was born in a small port town west of the kingdom. His father, while picking up trash from the streets, was a petty thief who would go after commuters' purses and small accessories. It was also said that Goldof's mother was a prostitute, but he never knew what she looked like or even what her name was.

Goldof was raised among thugs in the slums. It was a place where they would steal money from well-off people in the cities in order to live. And as a child Goldof's job had been to sell items he collected from the trash that could still be used.

Far from trading words with royalty or the upper class nobility, Goldof was never allowed to even enter into their fields of vision.

#

Goldof was an extremely reserved young boy. If talked to, he would rarely reply and when he did he would only speak a few words. He simply digested expressionlessly what was said to him by his father and by other adults in the area. The people living in the slums, everyone in fact, had thought him stupid.

However there was one thing about Goldof that was different from the other young boys.

Goldof had been born with incredible strength.

His body grew at double the speed of the children around him and so did his strength. Goldof had reflexes, agility, dexterity, and a top notch and peculiarly sharp mind that only knights possessed.

But there was no discernible reason why he was so strong. He didn't have a teacher, nor had he trained ever so hard. He never even wanted to become strong in the first place. He was just strong for no reason.

However, Goldof knew firsthand that his abilities were not always a blessing.

#

The first time he had killed a living creature was when he was four years old. He grabbed the tail of a stray dog that had bit him and swung it around in the air until it died.

The first time he'd broken someone's bones was when he was seven. On the way to his father's after picking up a small ring on the side of the road, a young boy about the same age as himself stole the ring from his side pocket. Goldof grabbed the boy's hand with all his might and heard a disgusting noise. The boy then cowered to the ground, wailing in tears. Goldof just stood over the crying boy and looked down at him.

The first fight he had gotten into was at the same age of seven.

The young boys in the slum had formed a gang and were living together. They figured that if they stayed together they would be able to protect themselves from unreasonable violence and also work together to steal from the adults. The gang plotted revenge against Goldof for the pickpocket he had injured earlier. And in the middle of the night they surrounded him, holding makeshift weapons.

Without saying anything, Goldof beat and kicked them around. He didn't apologize, nor did he cry. Then when his head was hit with a metal pole, his memory cut out.

Several minutes after, Goldof found his hands covered in blood while all of the other young boys were down on the ground. Out of the nine, two suffered injuries that would later prevent them from ever returning to normal for the rest of their lives.

The first time Goldof had killed someone was when he was eight. His petty thief of a father had stolen a wallet from a slightly bad mark. His father then ended up being surrounded by a group of brutes on the street and was kicked around.

Goldof approached one of the men from behind, grabbed him by the hair and smashed him into the ground. Then he twisted the man's neck. The man instantly stopped moving.

Two small sisters ran out from the crowd surrounding the men and rushed to the corpse. They clung to the dead man, crying and showering Goldof with as many curses as they could. Apparently the dead man had been their older brother. One of the girls then tried to stab Goldof with a kitchen knife but he kicked her away as hard as he could.

The first time he had beaten his father had been the same year.

In a small hut at a back alley, Goldof's father grabbed him by the collar and screamed at him with tears running down his face, "Because you've been going around being violent, the people are even starting to hate me. I can't live here anymore. And it's all your fault."

Goldof head-butted his father, then proceeded to kick his face until it became a disfigured mess. Eventually his father apologized and begged for Goldof to stop. And when Goldof finally stopped kicking, his father scurried away for dear life. After that Goldof never saw his father again.

Goldof beat countless people. Sometimes it had been to protect himself. And other times it had just been for the most trivial of reasons.



Ever since he was young it felt like dark coals resided within Goldof's chest. Whenever something rubbed him the wrong way those coals would ignite. And it didn't matter how petty the conflict was or even who was at fault. When that dark fire flared, everything around Goldof descended into a sea of blood. Whether his opponent was a small girl or his father, his only blood relative, it made no difference.

Once the fire roared, even Goldof himself couldn't put it out.

Many people detested him. Well-off people from the city averted their eyes just at the sight of him. And young boys around his age would hide when they saw him and run away.

Even the worst of ruffians didn't accept him. Their violence was simply a means of survival whereas Goldof's fighting just to break and injure others was at complete odds with their mentality. In the shadows they all called him terrible things and waited eagerly for a chance to take his life.

It wasn't that Goldof enjoyed beating others. Nor was it that he became happy when he won. He wasn't proud of being strong.

Goldof simply wanted to live a normal life. He wanted to play with friends, have a relationship with his father, and live while holding on to a small semblance of happiness. However when the fire raged within him he injured the people around him. And when that happened Goldof couldn't do anything about it.



Goldof lived through his youth feared and hated.

Before long he came to realize one truth: The world did not desire his existence. In fact there wasn't even one person in the entire world who wished for him to live. And probably neither did he.

Then when he was ten, the boy that was detested by everyone and everything in the entire world met a girl.

#

Several days before, Goldof had noticed a giant commotion in the city. Soldiers of the royal family that governed the city were prowling everywhere. Far from trying to preserve peace, they usually did nothing but extort money from the people in the city.

The soldiers also came to the slums, quietly lurking among the people so as not to cause too many problems.

At the time Goldof had been earning his daily income picking up trash. Whenever he appeared, people of the town would purposefully avert their eyes as young children and women would hurry and disappear. Even sellers whom he sold the items of value to would barely talk with him. That was the daily life Goldof went through.

The soldiers seemed to be searching for something in the back streets. And from what he could overhear, it sounded like they were looking for a girl. Goldof didn't know who that girl was or why they were searching for her, but a rumor was going around the town that whoever found her would get a large amount of money.

Some of the Slums' residents searched for the girl in an attempt to get rich quick while others hid out of concern that fights would break out in the streets. There were various other reactions among the citizens; however Goldof had no intention of getting involved with any of those.

"Hey kid. Have you seen...?" One of the soldiers called out to Goldof.

"Move aside," Goldof said, glaring at the soldier and interrupting him before he could finish what he was saying.

The soldier flinched at Goldof's retort as Goldof walked wordlessly right past him. For as much as possible, Goldof tried not to get involved with people. So he never talked with anyone. As long as he did that much, he wouldn't be able to hurt them, neither would he be able to hurt himself. He'd picked up this worldly wisdom by the time he was ten.

"Mr. Soldier, it might be better not to talk to him. He'll get angry."

Goldof faintly heard another man warn the soldier from behind him. Luckily the dark coals within him hadn't flared up. If they had, he probably would have beaten the soldier to death as well as the man who had talked to him.

After trading the trash for money and buying some bread, Goldof went back home. Even compared with the rest of the slums, his small hut was still in the dirtiest area.

When he tried to open the broken door to his hut, Goldof noticed that there was someone inside.

*Is it a petty thief who doesn't know me and unluckily decided to rummage through my home? Or is it someone who has a grudge against me and is trying to light my hut on fire?* Goldof had no idea what their motive was, but regardless, the dark fire within his chest started to flare up.

*Will I kill them,* Goldof wondered as he opened the door. However, the next moment Goldof froze.

"...Who...?"

There was a girl inside the hut. She was lying curled up on the floor with her eyes closed. She was clothed in rags that even the kids in the slums wouldn't wear. Her face was extremely dirty and her cheeks were hollow. However, her long blonde hair was glimmering slightly.

The moment that Goldof saw her face the fire within him suddenly withered away. It was the first time that had ever happened to him in his entire life. Every time so far the fire within him ignited he would end up beating someone.

The girl was beautiful. She was probably in her early teens or younger. He drew closer and quietly tried to touch the girl's cheek. But right when his finger was about a centimeter from her face he stopped.

For some reason Goldof felt like he couldn't touch her. He felt like if he touched her she would break.

"...Ah."

The girl opened her eyes and stared directly into Goldof's eyes. That alone was enough to make Goldof feel uneasy. He felt like he had done something he wasn't supposed to do.

Seeing Goldof petrified with his hand still extended, the girl tilted her head to the side.

"Is Minia okay?" the girl asked as she sat up.

Not understanding what she meant, Goldof was unable to respond.

"Ah, so I guess you're not one of Babbitt's men," the girl said. Babbitt was the name of the royal that governed the city. And it was at that moment Goldof realized that she was the girl the soldiers were looking for.

"I don't intend on running. So please relax. Plus I think it would be better to capture me without injuring me. You'll probably be able to get a bigger reward."

Still sitting on the floor, the girl quietly hugged herself. She was scared, Goldof realized. But not knowing what he should do, Goldof continued to remain quiet for a long time.

"Umm...don't you plan on capturing me? Or are you perhaps the person who lives in this house?"

Goldof nodded and the girl lowered her head.

"So that's it. I'm sorry. I've selfishly bothered you. But I was really tired and I wanted to rest. I can't do anything at the moment, but at least I can give you this apology."

I don't mind, Goldof tried to say but the words wouldn't come out.

The girl's face captivated Goldof. He wasn't able to see anything else. It was like he had forgotten about everything else besides himself and the girl.

Suddenly there was a large commotion in front of his hut.

"Did you search this house?!"

"Not yet!"

Without knocking on the door the soldiers entered the hut. And when the soldiers saw the girl their eyes opened wide. Then they approached, practically licking their lips in anticipation.

"We finally found you. You can't run anymore."

The girl silently stood up. The color of her face had changed and now her face was stiff with terror and her legs were trembling.

"Come to us. We won't take no for an answer."

"...Un...understood," the girl replied.

The soldiers completely ignored Goldof. They grabbed the girl's arms and started to march her out of the hut. But in a moment the fire reignited within Goldof. And it burned stronger and hotter than ever before.

He didn't know who this girl was or why the soldiers had been pursuing her. All he knew was that he immediately felt like he had to kill them all.

Goldof balled his hands into fists and took a step forward.

"That guy over there!" The girl shouted suddenly, surprising the soldiers. At the same time, Goldof, who was about to attack, also stopped moving. "That guy over there...this has nothing to do with him."

The soldiers looked at Goldof and shrugged. Then the girl looked at Goldof's face and with a smile said, "Hey I'm fine. Please don't worry about me."

The instant Goldof heard those words the fire within his chest once again disappeared. Goldof figured that if the girl said it was okay not to fight, then he didn't need to fight.

Surrounded by the soldiers, the girl was escorted out of the hut. Goldof silently watched her as she left and eventually the girl turned around and bowed her head to Goldof.

"Young man, truly, thank you for everything. I won't forget your kindness."

The soldiers, not understanding the meaning of her words, tilted their heads in confusion.

For a while Goldof continued to stand still where he was. He didn't know what he should do or why the girl had thanked him.

"...Ah, I get it."

After a while Goldof finally realized what she had meant. The girl saw that he was about to beat the soldiers, and thinking that the soldiers would have killed him had he done so, she stopped him from attacking. And so for trying to help her, she thanked him.

That girl had stood up for Goldof. Perhaps she would have been able to escape while he was fighting, yet she had placed Goldof's life before her own.

The moment after he'd realized that Goldof leapt out from his hut.

#

It wasn't until much later that Goldof found out the girl's name was Nashetania Louis Piena. And a year after they'd met, the name Augustra was added to her own, designating her as the heir apparent to the Piena throne.

At the time he met her, however, there was a large-scale political change taking place within the Kingdom of Piena.



The king Nalptum went mad all of a sudden. He announced that Pagan followers were spreading throughout the kingdom and that they believed religiously in The Majin and were plotting to annihilate the world. And he thought they were coming after him.

Under the ruse of protecting the world, many innocent people from citizens to nobles were victimized under his hand. And even his own daughter Nashetania was deemed one of the pagan followers.

However, no matter how much the knights and the prime minister searched they could not find that pagan cult within the Piena kingdom. Still Nalptum's delusions would not go away and in the end he disowned his daughter and ordered her execution.

The king named one of his distant relatives, a prince from another country, as the next king. Then he declared that the person who killed the most pagan followers would be given a big reward and a special position in the kingdom.

And so a civil war erupted within the kingdom. People seeking money and status framed innocent nobles and aristocrats. Afterwards the king would either revoke their positions or have them executed.

Nashetania's life had been targeted so she had no choice but to leave the capital, disguise herself as a common citizen and run. She wouldn't become the Saint of Blades until three years later. At that time she was merely just a powerless girl.

The day she met Goldof, Nashetania and some of her vassals must have gone to the nobles that governed Goldof's city. However those nobles betrayed Nashetania and arrested her guards and the maids that followed her, all except for one.

Nashetania continued to run without her guards, but in the end she lost sight of even the last maid at her side. Before long she managed to reach the small hut in the slums where she met Goldof.

#

Goldof ran out of the hut, the dark fire scorching his chest. His eyes were blood shot and his breathing ragged like a wild animal. Other than his will to fight, all other emotions faded from his mind.

He searched for the girl and the soldiers. But they had already withdrawn from the slums.

Goldof stopped people going down the road and questioned them about the girl's whereabouts. Majority of his questions no one knew anything about, but there was one person who had overheard the soldiers talking. From what he could gather Goldof thought that the Princess would be forcibly brought to the Royal's mansion where she would be killed.

He then continued to go around asking about the Princess' whereabouts in detail. Eventually he found some people who had spotted the princess leaving the city in a four-horse carriage.

"...The Aristocrat's...mansion?" Goldof muttered.

Pillaging the biggest hammer he could from an architect nearby, he headed out of the port town.

Goldof ran down the city streets. Although the aristocrat's mansion was about half a day away, no matter how fast Goldof ran it was impossible for him to catch up with the four-horse carriage.

The sun fell and the area became wrapped in darkness. But Goldof continued to run down the main road, with wolves howling in the distance. Eventually he reached the aristocrat's mansion, but when he tried to approach the door, two gate keepers pointed their spears at him.

The fire in his chest was burning hotter than ever before. But at that moment the heat wasn't unpleasant. Goldof howled like a wild beast and attacked the gate keepers.

He didn't really remember what happened after that. With the giant hammer in his hand, Goldof beat down anyone that appeared before him. And when the hammer broke he stole one of the spears the soldiers were wielding and frantically swung it around like a madman.

But no matter how strong Goldof was he was still a ten year old boy. It was also the first time in his whole life that he had used a spear. There was no way that he could match armed soldiers who had been formally trained.

With his consciousness fading, Goldof's vision grew hazy. However, he also noticed that there were people other than himself fighting. About ten knights had pushed into the mansion and were fighting with the soldiers.

"The Princess is safe!" One of the knights shouted.

And then suddenly Goldof's consciousness cut out.

#

When Goldof came to, his entire body was wrapped in bandages as he lay on a soft unfamiliar bed. When he asked the young knight beside him about where he was, the knight told him that he was at one of the barracks of the Black Horn Knights. Previously it had been a special infirmary that only the members of royalty could use, but the knight said Goldof was receiving special treatment.

Goldof's next question was if the girl was safe. The knight laughed and replied, "Princess Nashetania is safe."

That was the first time Goldof had heard the girl's name. And the knight was shocked that Goldof didn't know who she was.

"Are you saying that you fought that much for someone whose name you didn't even know?"

When Goldof nodded the knight waved his hand as if he didn't believe him. But Goldof wanted to know more about Nashetania.

According to the young knight, Nashetania had been saved by one of the kingdom's twelve knight corps, the very Black Horn Knights whose barracks he was in at the moment.

At the time Goldof met Nashetania, the leader of the knights Gazama had already known that Nashetania had fallen into danger. He ordered his knights to head out to launch a surprise attack against Babbitt's mansion and save her. Allegedly they had arrived just 30 minutes after Goldof had broken in.

Babbitt was killed by the Black Horn Knights and Nashetania was saved. The knight then explained that there were three knight corps at Nashetania's side now, so she was no longer in danger.

Besides, it looked like Babbitt was only intending to kill Nashetania after taking her to the capital. So when Goldof had attacked the mansion Nashetania's life hadn't quite been in immediate danger.

In other words, even if Goldof hadn't fought, Nashetania would have been saved by the Black Horn Knights. So it seemed Goldof's rescue attempt had been pointless.

However the young knight did say that the courage it took for him to head to the enemy's camp alone in order to save the princess was greater than any knight's and that all knights should try to emulate Goldof's behavior.

But the knight's words confused Goldof, seeing as it was the first time in his entire life that he had been praised by anyone.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. The knight stood at attention and invited the visitor in.

Nashetania entered, dressed in a simple white dress. With an elegant gait she walked over to the bed. As he watched her Goldof's heart began to throb and his body grew hot. It was enough to make his unhealed wounds begin to ooze out blood.

"So you are safe. First I'd like to ask your name."

Nashetania spoke with an elegant tone completely different from the first time they had met. With his face turning red, Goldof said his name.

"Goldof...that's a nice name."

Nashetania's words didn't reach Goldof's ears. He was captivated by the girl's face and couldn't think.

The knight beside Goldof then said, "Goldof-dono, when the princess gives you a compliment you should..." But Nashetania waved her hand indicating it wasn't necessary for him to continue.

"Knight Bob. Please leave your post. I want to talk with him alone."

"As you wish."

The entire time the knight was leaving the infirmary Goldof still continued to stare at Nashetania's face. When they were finally alone Nashetania lowered her composed look and showed a carefree smile.

"So the guy is called Goldof-san? And I am actually called Nashetania. Hehehe, were you shocked?"

Goldof nodded. Then Nashetania extended her hand towards him. Goldof very hesitantly accepted the handshake. It was the first time he had been touched by a girl so he had to hold her hand differently than when he was beating up people.

"Ever since we first met, you have been such a quiet guy."

"...That's right."

"How old are you? Who taught you how to use a spear?"

"That...was the first time...I'd touched a spear. And...I'm ten."

"Really? Ten...you're younger than me?!"

Nashetania's eyes widened as she looked Goldof up and down.

"What? Really? Your body isn't...ah, but your face is quite child-like."

Goldof felt embarrassed being checked out by her so he averted his eyes. And Nashetania, after tilting her head many times, seemed to be convinced he was telling the truth.

She asked him about his injuries and then gently touched his body to check them. Not all of them were minor but Nashetania smiled happily, knowing that he would heal.

When Goldof spoke with Nashetania a strange feeling welled up within him. The feeling shone through his heart making it feel warm and at peace. Goldof realized later that the feeling was a peace of mind.

"Goldof-san, no, that's not right. Goldof-kun. There is one important thing that I forgot to ask. Why did you come help me?"



During the rescue Goldof had been completely absorbed within his own mind. He couldn't skillfully put the reason into words, and as he tried to think of an explanation, tears started to spill down his face without warning. And no matter how many times he wiped them away they would not stop.

"What's the matter? Are you in pain?"

Goldof tried to say something but the words wouldn't come out.

Nashetania smiled and said, "You don't have to force yourself to speak. I'll wait until the tears stop."

For a long time Goldof cried. When he had awoken it was still daytime, but the sun had set then and Goldof still continued to cry. The entire time Nashetania waited without making a single unpleasant face.

For a long time Goldof wanted to be praised by somebody. He wanted to be needed by someone. And though it was good that he could live in the world, he had wanted someone to confide in. For the first time living had meaning. And Goldof cried at the beauty of that.

After Nashetania left, Goldof realized that he wanted to protect her. He wanted to be needed by her. And he wanted to see her again. Nashetania was safe and she had stood before him. That fact by itself was beautiful and it made him cry.

Eventually Goldof stopped crying. Then after his long, long confession Nashetania replied, "Goldof-kun. I'm glad that you are in this kingdom. Thank you very much for coming to help me. Please, in what way can I thank you?"

"There...isn't anything...I want."

Nashetania shook her head. "For a stranger to do this much for me, I can't not thank you."

However there was nothing that Goldof wanted. He already received what he wanted. He had wanted to see Nashetania once again and be thanked by her. Anything more than that wasn't necessary.

After thinking and thinking, Goldof finally said, "I have just one...request."

"What is it?"

"If you fall into danger once again..." As Goldof was saying his request, he hesitated. He was uneasy over whether or not she would accept. "Would it be alright for me to come save you again?"

Hearing those words Nashetania placed her hand to her mouth. There was a glimmer of tears in her eyes.

"Of course. Please save me. Again and again and again, please save me."

Goldof thought that his tears had run out, but relieved by her response they once again started to fall.

#

And that was how Goldof became a knight that served Nashetania.

When the civil war was settled Nashetania returned to the capital. King Nalptum had all of his power revoked and became a mere figurehead on the throne. The prime minister Nashetania had named took on the responsibility of governing the entire kingdom.

By Nashetania's command Goldof became the apprentice of the low class knight Kenzo Aurora. And as a result Goldof's name was changed to that of the knight's. Goldof learned how to read and write, he was taught how to use a spear, and he picked up polite etiquette and the knight's knowledge.

He couldn't say that living at the royal kingdom was pleasant. He had to carry the weight of coming from a low class background. And there were other knights who envied the fact that he was so powerful. But that discomfort was nothing compared to the joy he felt when he was able to be by Nashetania's side.

When he was by Nashetania's side he was able to suppress the dark fire within his chest. And he was able to forget his violent power. It was like he was making a fresh start.

But Nashetania was an unbelievably extreme tomboy. And often the trouble she caused around the kingdom confused even Goldof.

#

When Goldof was fourteen he became the youngest person in history to win a tournament before the Goddess. And as his reward, he was given the position of the leader of the Black Horn Knights. However he was the leader in name only. In actuality the commander of the knights was still the previous leader Gazama.

At the same time Goldof was given another reward. It was a Sacred Instrument that had been passed down through generations of the Piena Royal line. It was an item that had been made in secret 400 years ago by the King of Piena at that time. The leader of the Head Temple did not know of its existence, and Goldof was not allowed to disclose the existence or the abilities of the instrument itself to another soul.

It was called the Helmet of Truth and it was a Sacred Instrument imbued with the power of the Saint of Words. The ability of the Helmet of Truth would automatically activate if its master\_ was captured. First a bell-like noise would ring then the master's danger would be conveyed to the person wearing the helmet. No one other than the person with the helmet could hear that sound.

Then the master and the person wearing the Helmet of Truth would be able to actually exchange words with one another. No matter how far apart they were, with just a slight whisper they could hear each other's voice.

However the helmet did have a drawback. The Instrument would only activate if the master has been captured. Even if the master falls into danger, for as long as he or she wasn't captured, the helmet would not react at all.

Goldof continued to keep the helmet close to him at all times. Sometimes he would wear it in the most unreasonable of settings, turning himself into a laughingstock.

#

But Goldof loved Nashetania. That was a fact he could not deny. More importantly however, Goldof had pledged a deep loyalty to her. There were times when his love cooled for her. But Goldof's loyalty never ceased. Goldof believed that his loyalty was far deeper than his love for her.

Nashetania was a good master.

There were many times where she had selfishly created trouble for others. Sometimes she would slip out of the castle and talk to people of lower social status. Other times she would trouble her vassals with impossible challenges pressed upon them. She was always acting in a way unfit for a princess.

The most troubling thing, however, that she did was when she had thrown a tantrum upon becoming a Saint. Nevertheless, all of Nashetania's behavior was, in her own way, done for the subjects and the citizens of her kingdom.

"I don't want to become a princess who is only protected by others. I will become a princess who protects the people," Nashetania had said, with her chest stuck out in pride. Goldof was worried about her, but at the same time he found her lovely and was very proud of her.

She was the reason for Goldof's existence.

Master may not be the right word. The nuance is the person that the holder serves, like their ruler, not someone whom they are a slave to

### Chapter Four: Part Two

*This is a bad dream*, Goldof thought. If he were to close his eyes and then open them again, he would certainly awake from the dream. Nashetania wouldn't be the seventh and she would still be the master he had to protect. Thinking that Goldof closed his eyes.

"..."

After keeping his eyes closed for a while, Goldof opened his eyelids. But the sight before him was truly a nightmarish reality after all. He was in the Wailing Demon Territory. And with him were five Heroes of the Six Flowers and one impostor. And his beloved Nashetania was nowhere to be seen.

*If this is a nightmare then hurry up and wake up*, he had thought, but as he opened his eyes the reality in front of him didn't change at all.

It was noon on the seventeenth day after the Majin had awoken. After leaving the Forest of Severed Fingers the Heroes of the Six Flowers were now in front of the giant valley separating the Wailing Demon Territory.

"Meoww! It's huge, meow! This is the first time I've seen something this incredible."

Hans seemed to be in a good mood at the edge of the over 100 meter deep valley. The other companions gasped at the enormity of the valley with only Fremy remaining calm and collected. Meanwhile Goldof had been staring blankly at them from a little distance away.

"It's unbelievable. Was all of this dug out by the Kyoma?"

"The Kyoma have continued to prepare for the battle with the Six Flowers for three hundred years. Excavating a valley like this was no trouble at all." Fremy replied.

"How are we going to get across this valley? Tgurneu will soon notice that we have gotten out of the forest. Then Kyoma will flood this area and we'll be surrounded."

The companions all looked serious as they talked with one another. Whereas Goldof just stood there silently without contributing anything to the conversation.

Four days had passed since Nashetania declared herself the seventh and disappeared from Goldof's sight. For Goldof those four days had been a nightmare.

Everything in front of him seemed terribly far away. He couldn't collect his thoughts about anything and his expression was blank, as if he had left his emotions behind somewhere. Neither sadness nor anger could be perceived on his face.



Rolonia's appearance. Them entering the Wailing Demon Territory. Their fight with Tgurneu. Adlet unraveling the secrets revolving around Mora. Their conversation at the Eternal Flower. The seven of them working together to get through the Forest of Severed Fingers. All of those memories were vague and he couldn't clearly recall a single one.

Fremy and Mora had said that they were suspicious of him. And over and over again Adlet had tried to cheer him up. But Goldof didn't care about that either.

"Is there no bridge, Fremy?"

"There is. There's one on both the northern and southern tips. But I think it would be impossible to get to them. Cargikk's followers are waiting to ambush us and are planning to wipe us out as soon as it seems like we could get across," Fremy replied.

"Is there nothing else, Fremy? No secret path or something? Is there any way we can safely cross the valley without using the bridges?" Chamo asked.

"There was probably no reason to make something like that since the Kyoma usually use the bridges to cross the valley."

The companions considered ways to cross the bridge, but Goldof couldn't add to their discussion. If he tried to think he couldn't collect his thoughts. And even if he tried to talk he didn't know what he should say.

For the past four days Goldof had become unable to talk. He had been a quiet person for as long as he could remember. And for the past six years he should have learned the appropriate behavior and manner of speaking befitting a knight. However, no matter what he did Goldof could not remember how he had been able to speak in the past.

Goldof looked over the valley, but he was not thinking of a way to cross it. He was searching for Nashetania. For the four days since he had come to the Wailing Demon Territory he had constantly been searching for her.

"..."

The events of four days ago floated about in Goldof's mind. The time Nashetania had confessed her crimes and then run into the forest.

#

The Heroes of the Six Flowers ran through the dark forest. Hans, Chamo, and Mora had been chasing after Nashetania who was trying to escape. Meanwhile Adlet was unconscious and Fremy was treating his injuries. It was getting extremely late and dawn was near.

Within the night forest Goldof alone stood in front of the temple.

"Goldof, did Nashetania come back there?" Mora spoke to him from the edge of forest. But Goldof shook his head. "There are no signs of her here either," Mora continued. "It seems we've lost track of her somehow. If we can, I want to kill her tonight."

It was said that even after the Illusion Fog Barrier was deactivated, the effects of the barrier would continue to linger for a while until the fog had completely cleared up. That would mean not even Nashetania herself could leave the barrier that night. Hans and Mora both insisted that if they couldn't finish her off then, the Heroes would probably fall into another dangerous situation later on.

"It seems like Nashetania is using some strange technique," Mora said.

"She suddenly vanished in front of Hans and myself multiple times. Have you noticed that at all?"

Goldof wouldn't even nod and with a sigh Mora left the temple. A little while after she had disappeared from sight, a voice called out to him from the temple.

"It looks like somehow...I was able to fool them."

Nashetania came out from the giant hole in the Temple floor. Her armor was broken, her rapier had been snapped in two and she was pressing her hands to the cuts on her arms. She seemed to be extremely exhausted.

"If you hadn't been there I would be dead... Hans-san is truly frightening."  
Nashetania said with a smile.

Nashetania was cornered. She didn't stand a chance against Hans or Chamo. Plus Hans had already figured out her mysterious technique for disappearing. But Goldof would defend her without hesitation.

"Soon the barrier's effectiveness will end. I wonder if after that I'll somehow be able to get out of here...ughh." Nashetania winced. She was probably hurting from Hans' injuries.

"...Why?" Goldof asked.

"Why? That's all you don't know? What do you really want to ask me?"

With a wry smile Nashetania spread her arms out wide. Her expression was the Nashetania Goldof knew well. The girl who was selfish and loved teasing around. She was honest and not two-faced. She was always overflowing with confidence and no matter what kind of person she was facing she would interact with them without distinction. She both troubled the citizens of the kingdom and was loved by them. That Nashetania was standing before him, unchanged.

"Why...why...why did you...?"

Goldof was confused and could not skillfully get the words to come out. Seeing Goldof like that Nashetania laughed as if he were a hopeless child.

"Goldof, you may not be able to believe it, but I am the seventh. From the beginning I had come here intent on killing the Heroes of the Six Flowers."

No matter how many times he heard it, he still couldn't believe it. He probably didn't want to.

"I'm not being manipulated by anyone. And it's not like I have no choice. Me, I fought of my own free will...and lost. But I don't plan on giving up. As long as I live I must continue to fight."

"...For what purpose? Why did you betray us?"

"For ambitions." The instant Nashetania said that she showed Goldof a face that he had never seen before. In her eyes there was levelheadedness and an unshakable resolve.

"I have ambitions. And in order to accomplish those I am not afraid of any kind of hardships. It doesn't matter what kind of sacrifices, and I'm fine with whatever kind of bad reputation I have to bear. Because my life is not precious."

"...Ambitions," Goldof muttered that word. It seemed like a word that didn't really match Nashetania.

"Right, ambitions. Dreams and ideals, those nice sounding words cannot be used to explain this thought. If it is a dream, I can give up. If it is for an ideal then I can throw it away. But the ambitions I bear, I cannot give them for as long as I live."

Nashetania drew close to Goldof's face. From her expression Goldof could sense fear. It was a face that he had never seen on the master he had sworn to protect for his entire life. It was Nashetania's true self.

"You won't understand. People that don't have any ambitions cannot understand my feelings."

Staring at the silent Goldof, Nashetania giggled. Come to think of it, he and Nashetania had a rather long relationship. However he may have never spoken with her true persona. But Goldof wanted to protect her, and the current revelation could not trample that feeling at the bottom of his heart.

"So what are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to run. Then I will reunite with my comrades and think about what to do next."

"...Comrades?"

"That's right. I have a comrade. His name is Dozzu. Before I met you Dozzu had been by my side. The same ambition burns within us and we are fighting together. I will not betray Dozzu by any means and Dozzu would never betray me."

"Who is this Dozzu?"

"He is the Kyoma traitor whose life is being targeted by the other Kyoma. I am the human traitor and Dozzu is the Kyoma traitor. Ahaha, it's a lovely relationship, don't you think?" Nashetania said jokingly. "I'm going to go now. The barrier's effect has ended. It will be a fairly difficult fight, but I should be able to escape at least."

"...Princess."

"We will probably meet again if I survive. I wonder if at that time we'll meet as enemies or as allies. If possible I would like it to be as allies."

*Please come back to sanity*, Goldof wanted to say to her. But he couldn't. His princess genuinely intended on fighting the Heroes of the Six Flowers. Which meant that the only option he had was to stop the Heroes from killing her.

Nashetania turned her back on Goldof and started to head back towards the escape route in the temple, but Goldof called out to her.

"Princess. What...should I....do?"

"You and I are enemies. So you don't need to speak politely," Nashetania said and then continued walking. "I ask that you believe in yourself and believe that what you are doing is correct. That is the only thing I can say."

"What in the world..."

"Find yourself. And if you believe that you are correct then you won't resent yourself or despair even if you have to kill Dozzu or myself."

"...Princess, what are your ambitions?"

Nashetania touched a hand to her chest and with pride she said, "I said it before, didn't I? To create a peaceful world. A world where I can see the smiles on the faces of every person in the world. I want to create a kingdom where both humans and Kyoma can become happy without distinction. That is all."

"Even if you have to sacrifice 500,000 people?"

"I prefer that as few people as possible have to die. But without killing anyone my ambitions cannot come true," Nashetania said, and then she exited the temple.

*Maybe everything that she'd said had been a lie, Goldof, now alone, thought. Perhaps all of the kind words she'd said since the first time they'd met had been a lie as well. And maybe even his feeling that he wanted to protect her wasn't true. Maybe for he was just a pawn to be used.*



Then at that moment Nashetania's voice came from outside the temple.

"Up until now I have tricked you and I'm sorry. I did not intend to deceive you, but I had to do it."

"...Princess."

"But there is one thing that is true. Six years ago when I heard your request, the joy that I felt that made me want to cry was genuine. I couldn't believe there was someone who thought about me from the bottom of their heart; someone who wanted to protect me even if they had to trade their life to do so."

Nashetania's voice slightly faded away.

"I have told you a lot of lies, but this one thing is the truth."

And with those words Goldof could no longer hear Nashetania's voice. After a while he began to hear Hans and Mora and their battle with Nashetania. And the entire time Goldof stood rooted to the spot.

#

Goldof didn't tell anyone about how he had hid Nashetania or even his conversation with her. In a way, Goldof was already betraying his companions.

As they continued through the Wailing Demon Territory Goldof continued to think about what had happened.

*What could Nashetania's ambitions be?*

*If she wanted to see the smiles on the faces of everyone in the world then wouldn't it be better to impose a good government over the land as queen? She could have done that. Or was her ambition to make the world her own? If that were the case then she could have done that too. With the power of the Piena kingdom, with my fighting abilities, and with Nashetania's own fighting abilities and renown, it should have been possible.*

*So why did she betray mankind? Why did she join forces with the Kyoma? And why was it necessary for her to fight the Six Flowers?*

*What kind of person was Dozzu? Fremy had said that Dozzu was the Kyoma traitor and that he opposed Tgurneu and Cargikk. But when and why did the Kyoma traitor and Nashetania meet in the first place?*

*Who was Nashetania?*

The girl that he loved was probably nothing more than a lie. But no matter how much he thought about it he couldn't come up with an answer.

*What should I do now?*

*Nashetania will definitely fight with the Heroes once again. And at that time will I have to fight her again? Would I even be able to do so?*

There was no way he could do that. Nashetania was everything to Goldof. If he lost Nashetania then he wouldn't be able to live. So in such a situation Goldof would have to fight with the Heroes in order to protect Nashetania. But he couldn't choose that path either. What would happen to the world if all the Six Flowers were wiped out? There was no way that a world where people and Kyoma lived together could become a reality. It was unthinkable that the world would be destroyed by his very own hands.

*Goldof anguished. Who in the world am I? Am I a knight that will protect Nashetania or am I a hero that will protect the world?* If he could only choose one of the two choices then he wondered which one he would choose.

*I have to protect the world,* Goldof thought. But the world that Goldof wanted to protect was a world with Nashetania in it. He couldn't find any value in a world without her.

Nashetania told him to believe in himself and his actions. But Goldof didn't know what was right anymore.

As Goldof continued to anguish alone, his other companions to his side continued their conversation. They were talking about a method to cross Cargikk's valley but it seemed like they still hadn't come up with any ideas.

"Well, for now there's no use in talking amongst ourselves. Let's divide into three groups and search for a way to cross the valley. It doesn't matter how particular the plan is. Find something. Hans and Mora, head north. Rolonia, Goldof, and I will go south. Chamo and Fremy will remain here to keep an eye out for enemies coming from the rear."

"It looks like this will be more troublesome than I thought." Mora said.

Goldof couldn't talk about his concerns and anxiety to his companions. Even if he told them they probably wouldn't understand. Because they were not him.

Goldof continued to be lost until it exhausted him. His wondering to himself over and over again without ever coming up with an answer wore him down. Especially since Goldof's spirit was by no means tough.

At the moment he had only one wish. He wanted to see Nashetania again. And when he met her he wanted to talk with her. He wanted something to resolve the anguish of not knowing where things were headed. However at the moment even such a trifle wish as that couldn't come true.

"Let's go, Goldof," Adlet said. It seemed like Adlet, Rolonia, and himself were going to search for a way to cross the valley.

As Goldof stared at the valley he thought, *Will Nashetania be there on the other side? Will I be able to see her again safe and sound?*

#

A little before that Nashetania was at the southeast section of the Lava Belt, sitting on a boulder and staring far away into the sky. Dozzu was sitting in her lap. Nashetania gently had her hands wrapped around his neck and was embracing him to her chest.

There were over 50 Kyoma around them. Among them was a rock-skinned lizard Kyoma, a lanky monkey Kyoma, and a silver-furred giant wolf Kyoma. All fifty of them were quietly waiting to receive orders.

"I wonder what Goldof-san is thinking about right now," Dozzu said with a quiet voice. It was so soft that Nashetania was the only person who could hear him.

"That's right. He's certainly troubled over whether to join our side or carry out the wishes of the Flowers. And more than anything he wants to see me again. That's probably what he's thinking."

"Is that so?"

"It's Goldof. There's no reason I wouldn't know that, right?" Nashetania said and then she smiled.

"You were truly raised as a cruel girl. Do you even feel sorry about using Goldof-san?"

"What are you saying? Goldof is definitely satisfied to be used by me."

Nashetania played with Dozzu's ear, a mischievous smile on her face.

"And wasn't he the one who got me this far?"

"You're absolutely right. You were raised splendidly raised."

Atop her lap Dozzu smiled.

"There is only a little bit of time left until we are ready. Let's believe in Goldof. He will do well for us."

#

Hot air was rising up from the bottom of the valley. Goldof leaned over the edge and felt the hot air on his cheeks as he stared down below. Even if he strained his eyes he couldn't find a place where it looked like they could cross. Adlet and Rolonia were also searching the valley for a way across.

Suddenly Goldof looked up to the sky and saw a moth Kyoma flying towards the south east.

"...Hey, Ad-kun."

"Did you find anything?" Adlet replied.

It seemed like the two of them had noticed the moth Kyoma. Goldof, however, didn't pay it any mind. He just returned back to blankly staring down at the bottom of the valley.

Then without any warning Goldof could hear the sound of a bell. He looked up and scanned the area. There was nothing that seemed to be ringing like a bell, and Adlet and Rolonia weren't reacting to the sound at all. They just talked and looked up at the sky. It seemed like they couldn't hear it.

It was then that Goldof realized the ringing sound was coming from the Helmet of Truth. It was the first time since he had received the helmet two years ago that the helmet had activated. The Helmet of Truth only activated when its master was captured. Which meant someone had caught Nashetania.

The helmet was repeating a shrill, piercing bell-like ringing. It made Goldof recall the details of the helmet that he had heard from Nashetania. The helmet's method of ringing happened when serious danger was approaching its master.

"Princess? Princess? What happened?" Unconsciously Goldof placed a hand to his helmet and called to Nashetania.

"...dof, are you still my...if you are..."

Nashetania's voice was coming from the helmet, but her words kept on cutting in and out. It sounded like she was having a very difficult time breathing.

The moment Goldof heard her voice, his entire body grew tense. It was like his heart was being strangled.

"Princess? Who captured you? Where are you?" Goldof whispered back. The idea that Nashetania was the enemy had faded from his mind.

"I've been captured by Tgurneu in the Lava Belt to the south of the Forest of Severed Fingers. I'm inside a Kyoma's stomach..."

The next instant, Goldof heard what sounded like something being crushed, then the sound of labored breathing and what sounded like someone vomiting. After that he couldn't hear anything. Goldof instantly realized that what he'd heard was the sound of a throat being strangled.

Reason told Goldof that he didn't need to go and help her. She was the enemy of the Six Flowers. And not only had she abandoned him but she was a traitor that was against all of mankind.



But his emotions violently urged him to go and save her. Nashetania was being murdered. And he lived in order to protect her. Abandoning her would be the death of his soul.

Goldof felt the dark fire rising up within his chest. It was the same fire as when he'd attacked the aristocrat's mansion alone in order to save Nashetania six years ago. When that fire burned, his reasoning, his fear, his levelheadedness, everything was burnt to cinders and Goldof couldn't think of anything else but fighting.

Goldof stood and started to walk towards the south. He had no choice.

"What's the matter, Goldof-san?" Rolonia called to him.

But Goldof didn't stop. At first he had been walking slowing but gradually he increased his speed as he headed south east.

"Yo, don't act on your own. At the moment you have no business over there," Adlet said as he grabbed Goldof's shoulder.

*Don't interfere*, Goldof thought. He was fine with anyone who got in his way drowned in the sea. On reflex Goldof grabbed Adlet's wrist and threw him to the ground.

"Ad-kun!" Rolonia screamed. But her words no longer reached Goldof's ears.

"What the hell are you doing, Goldof?!"

Adlet planned on getting in his way. *Don't interfere*. That was the only phrase occupying his mind.

"...The Princess is in danger."

His fists automatically started to move to hit Adlet. But with just the little bit of reason he had left he stopped himself before making contact.

"What happened? What's up with the Princess...with Nashetania?"

No longer were the Heroes of the Six Flowers, or the Majin, or the seventh, or even himself in Goldof's mind. The only thing he could think about was saving Nashetania.

"Wait, Goldof. Explain. What happened to Nashetania?"

"The Princess is in trouble. I am going to help her."

"What are you thinking? Nashetania is the enemy."

The moment Goldof heard that he also thought, *I wonder if you're the enemy too*.

In an instant his reason vanished. He punched Adlet in the gut. Adlet crumbled to his knees as Rolonia screamed and came over to his side.

"Adlet, Rolonia. I am going to help the Princess."

"Why all of a sudden?" Rolonia asked.

Goldof however simply spoke plain and clear. "Listen up and listen well. Do not get in my way. I am going to help the Princess."

Goldof decided without any hesitation or confusion that he would go save Nashetania by himself. Adlet and the others were Nashetania's enemy. If they acted together they would definitely try to stop Goldof.

*Leave me alone, Goldof thought. You all have your own fight. And I have mine.*

"I will go alone. Do not follow me."

Goldof turned his back on Adlet and continued to walk away.

"Please wait a moment, Goldof-san! What happened?!"

"Circumstances have changed. If you interfere, I will not let you live."

"Le...let us live?"

Rolonia's face contorted in fear. Goldof was serious. The fire within his chest could no longer be suppressed by anyone. Perhaps in his current state he wouldn't allow anyone who hurt Nashetania to live either. *I don't want to fight my companions. So leave me alone*, Goldof thought.

He left the confused Adlet and Rolonia where they were and walked away. And only then did he notice that he had been crying.

"...Princess, I am going to save you now."

Within his mind there was still a small amount of reason left. That reason was whispering to him. *This might be a trap. Nashetania is deceiving you and might be trying to kill you. Or she might be trying to use you in order to kill the other Heroes.*

But even if he thought that was the case, Goldof had no choice but to do as he was doing.

*I'm sorry*, Goldof thought to himself as he ran.

#

Goldof continued to run. He distanced himself from the valley and ran across a plain. On his way he encountered three Kyoma on the other side of the hills. In an instant he understood the situation and wondered what was the best way to kill them. Then he rushed to meet them and swung his spear. After only several seconds he had stabbed his spear through each of the Kyoma as they fell to the ground, spewing vomit.

Goldof felt that his senses were growing sharper. His sight and his hearing were sharper than ever and he was clearly able to understand all of his surroundings. Perhaps he was stronger now than ever before.

Suddenly he recalled Nashetania's words. She had said, "...Inside a Kyoma's stomach.. Goldof used the tip of his spear to rip open the Kyoma with one slash. But he didn't find anyone inside them. So he kept on running.

"Princess, can you talk? Where are you? What kind of enemies are around you?" Goldof called to Nashetania as he placed his hands to his helmet.

He could faintly hear what sounded like labored breathing, but no words responded to him.

Something was crushing Nashetania's throat. And when it came to The Helmet, if Nashetania did not call out with her voice than he wouldn't be able to hear her.

Nashetania had said that she'd been captured by Tgurneu. And Dozzu was the Kyoma traitor. So the Heroes were not the only people after Nashetania's life.

Thirty minutes later Goldof exited the plains and entered into a forest. Within 10 seconds he had cut them all down. Then he ripped open their stomachs and searched for Nashetania.

As Nashetania indicated, Tgurneu was in the Lava Belt. Tgurneu was an opponent who three days ago Adlet and the others couldn't take down. But Goldof didn't feel any fear at all. When he fought for Nashetania all the fear vanished from his mind at once.

The Helmet of Truth continued to ring in Goldof's head. Nashetania was still alive. And she was still in danger. As he ran, Goldof wondered, *why did Tgurneu capture Nashetania? What did he intend on doing with her captured?* He thought about it over and over, but he couldn't figure it out.

Then something appeared before Goldof. Stunned, Goldof came to a stop.

He soon realized that the figure was a Kyoma. The horn growing out of its head was proof of that. But it was small enough that he could wrap his arms around it, and it had the strange appearance of something like a cross between a dog and a squirrel.

However, Goldof remembered seeing that Kyoma before. Other than the horn growing out of its head, it was exactly the same as one of Nashetania's pets. It was a strange dog named Porta which she favored greatly over the other pets.

"...It can't be."

Goldof pointed his spear at the Kyoma. The Kyoma had been injured. Its entire body was covered in cuts, burns, and bruises.

"It's been a long time, Goldof-san." The Kyoma bent its hind legs and sat, politely bowing to Goldof.

"There's no way...it was you..."

"You are correct," The Kyoma said, sensing what Goldof was about to say. "I am Dozzu. I am one of the three commanders that govern the Kyoma and I am Nashetania's comrade. And for a while I had been Nashetania's pet.

Goldof recalled that that Kyoma had been by Nashetania's side long since before Goldof had been by her side. Nashetania had said that she discovered him in the forest by chance, then picked him up and took him back to her home because she thought he looked amusing.

"Did you cause the Princess to act this way?"

"No, I didn't," Dozzu denied, shaking his head. "Nashetania approves of my ideology and she became a comrade who will fight for those ambitions. By no means did I instigate anything."

*It's the same thing, Goldof thought. If it hadn't been for this Kyoma then Nashetania...* Goldof gripped his spear and started to thrust it at Dozzu, aiming for his heart.

"Goldof-san, as shameful as it is, I have something I'd like to request. I'd like you to please rescue my comrade Nashetania."

"?!" Goldof stopped his spear.

"Nashetania has been captured by Tgurneu. She should still be alive, but her life is in jeopardy. I can't oppose all of Tgurneu's forces with my power alone. Goldof-san, please."

Dozzu lowered his adorable face to the ground. And seeing him in that deep bow, Goldof lowered his spear. Then he approached the small Kyoma.

"We'll talk after."

After saying that Goldof picked up Dozzu's small body by the scruff of his neck and ran with him dangling from his hand.

"Wha...What are you doing?" Dozzu asked in confusion. But Goldof didn't pay him any mind.



Nashetania had said that Dozzu was her peerless companion. She could never betray Dozzu and Dozzu would never betray her. Perhaps it would be difficult for Goldof to save Nashetania on his own. He needed help.

"I will save the Princess. You didn't need to ask."

"Goldof-san, are you serious?"

"If I wasn't serious then I wouldn't have come here alone."

Dozzu's eyes widened. "You came here just by yourself? I can't believe it. I was worried about how to ask for your help, but I never thought you would say something like that."

"Where is the Princess?"

"She has been captured in the Lava Belt. It will take one hour from here if we run. It seems like she will be there."

It looked like they were going in the right direction. Goldof stared at the Kyoma dangling from his hands and said, "Tell me. What is there between you and the Princess?"

"...Yes, as you wish. Luckily it looks like we have time to talk," Dozzu said, and then he quietly began his story.

"My ambition is to stop the fighting between humans and Kyoma. I want to build a world where humans and Kyoma can live together in harmony. Two hundred years ago I left the Wailing Demon Territory with this ambition in my heart. And I went into hiding within the human world."

"To me that doesn't seem like anything more than a delusion."

"If this was the first time I'd heard it, then I'd probably agree with you. But I am confident that such an ambition is possible. And so is Nashetania."

"...The Princess...too?"

"The two of us know how to realize our objectives. But I absolutely cannot tell secrets to someone who is not a comrade. Please understand that."

"...Continue your story," Goldof commanded, and Dozzu complied.

"In order to make this ambition come true we needed companions. There were few Kyoma that would fight alongside us, but I was the only one that could develop the power needed for war. So we had to make a comrade out of a human warrior that possessed the power to be chosen as one of the Heroes of the Six

Flowers. And in order to find that comrade we created a secret society. For two hundred years we have been slowly formulating our plan."

Dozzu didn't say in what way they had created that secret society nor how they had advanced their plan. But it didn't matter, because there were other things Goldof wanted to hear.

"The influence of our secret society had even reached the center of the Piena Kingdom. Now Nashetania's mother Racheltania has passed. And so has her older brother, Clyetum, who had lost his life when he was young. Both of them were my comrades. But back in the day when they brought Nashetania to me, she too became my comrade."

"..."

"Aristocrats, businesspeople, the various neighboring kingdoms, all of them are affiliated with the Black Horn Knights. And my comrades are within their ranks as well."

Goldof recalled that the King of Piena, Nalphtum, was currently semi-imprisoned. Six years ago he had caused unrest when he'd said there were heretics spread across the kingdom who wanted to destroy the world. Goldof now realized that that was certainly not a delusion.

"Nalphtum was simply a foolish ruler, but contrary to expectations he had a sharp mind. The disturbance he caused six years ago was very dangerous for us."

It was a disgusting feeling. The motherland that Goldof had pledged his loyalty to was already under the Kyoma's control.

"...Why did you all fight with us? If your objective was world peace then couldn't you have made that happen if you wanted to?" Goldof asked.

"I will explain that as well. No matter what, we have to kill three of the Heroes in order to get Tgurneu and Cargikk to obey us."

"What do you mean?" Goldof asked automatically. Dozzu's words weren't adding up.

"Before leaving the Wailing Demon Territory I was involved in a contract with Cargikk and Tgurneu with the Saint of Words as an intermediary. The one who first kills three of the Heroes of the Six Flowers will become the leader that commands the Kyoma. The other two Kyoma commanders would have to obey the new leader. And we will die if we break that contract."

"..."

"If we can kill three of you Heroes then Tgurneu and Cargikk should become my subordinates. And if that happens then there will no longer be anyone standing in the way of our ambitions. We had staked everything on winning the fight within the Illusion Fog Barrier four days ago."

"But..."

"But you already know the results. Nashetania was beaten by Adlet-san's ingenuity and tenaciousness, as well as Hans-san's perceptiveness. If either of them weren't there then the fate of the world would have been changed."

Goldof gritted his teeth.

"But this is incomprehensible. Why did Tgurneu or Cargikk agree to such a contract?"

"Isn't it obvious? I tricked them," Dozzu quickly replied.

Then before Goldof's eyes five Kyoma appeared. With Dozzu still dangling from one of Dozzu's hands, he swung his spear and killed them all. Then he tore open their stomachs and checked their insides.

"Goldof-san, you're wasting your time. Nashetania is not in a place like that," Dozzu said.

Goldof already knew that. But he still had to search for her.

After finishing his search Goldof continued to run. The Lava Belt was no longer that far away.

"...I understand your situation. But the Princess is more important. What is going on with her?"

"Right, let me explain. After she was beaten by all of you Nashetania swam in the ocean for a day before reuniting with me. That was when Tgurneu's forces appeared. We couldn't do anything but run from place to place."

"...And then?"

"We gathered all of our remaining comrades at the Lava Belt. Then we lured Tgurneu over and launched our final battle. I thought that if I could crush Tgurneu a path would open up to us. But over the past two hundred years Tgurneu has become so strong that I couldn't stand a chance against him. All of our comrades were wiped out and even Nashetania was captured." After that Dozzu fell silent.

"I have a number of things I want to ask you."

"Go ahead."

"Who is the seventh?"

"...I have a rough idea, but I can't say for certain."

"What are you saying?"

"The seventh among the Heroes is not our comrade. After seeing Tgurneu's plans there is probably no mistaking it. Though it is hard to believe, both Tgurneu and I came up with the plan to have an impostor Hero killing the Six Flowers from within."

"I can't....believe that."

"I feel the same way. Our comrades had searched for you Heroes to check on your situation. And when Nashetania and I heard from them that the Heroes of the Six Flowers had once again increased by one we were at a loss for words."

"...I still have things I want to ask you. How did you acquire the fake crest that the Princess possesses?"

"I can't answer that," Dozzu replied flatly.

"Well, there's something else I want to ask. Do you...Do you and the princess still plan on carrying out your ambitions?"

As far as he'd heard from Dozzu's story, it seemed like Dozzu and Nashetania were in a hopeless situation.

After thinking for a while, Dozzu replied. "Those who hold onto an ambition cannot stop until their lives have ended. Even if the possibility of success is zero, as long as we are alive we have to continue to fight."

That was the same thing that Nashetania had said in the Illusion Fog Barrier.

"You and I are enemies," Goldof said clearly. "But I want to protect the Princess. I want the Princess to live. And I will do whatever I have to in order to stop the Princess from continuing this insane fight."

"Unfortunately that is impossible. Nashetania will continue to fight for our ambitions for as long as she is alive. If you want to protect her then the only option you have is to fight alongside her for those same ambitions."

Goldof went silent. He couldn't think of a response.

"...I..."

"At the moment I'm not going to venture and ask you for a reply. I just hope that you follow the path you believe to be correct. Nashetania said the same thing to you, right?"

*Will I protect Nashetania?* That's what Goldof was wondering. But in order to do that who would he probably have to fight? Was there another way to protect the Princess besides killing Dozzu to stop Nashetania or killing the Heroes?

Goldof decided to hold off on making a decision. There was nothing he could do about the future just by thinking about it. At the moment he had to rescue Nashetania from Tgurneu's clutch. That was all.



"Tgurneu shouldn't be able to kill Nashetania as he pleases," Dozzu said.

"What do you mean?"

"About a year ago my brethren in the Wailing Demon Territory sent a message to me in the royal palace. They said that Tgurneu wanted to meet with me. I had thought the message was strange, but I answered the call anyway. I changed my appearance and headed to the meeting place that Tgurneu indicated.

"Ah, I'm late in explaining this, but I have the ability to change my appearance. Even the form I have now is not the form that I was born with."

"So?"

"At the location were Tgurneu and Marmanna-san, the Saint of Words. Tgurneu made a request of me. He wanted me to kill Fremy Speeddraw."

*That's strange*, Goldof thought. Fremy said that Tgurneu had intended on discarding her from the beginning. If that were the case then it was unnatural for him to get involved in a contract like that. Either that or Dozzu was lying.

"I said I would accept only if I could make another request in return. Up until now I have given a mark of proof to all of my human comrades. I requested that Tgurneu would not kill any person who bore that mark.

Tgurneu willingly agreed and we created a pact through Marmanna-san. Of course Nashetania is one of the people who bear my mark."

Goldof thought about whether or not his words were true. But if such an event didn't happen then there would be no reason for Tgurneu to let Nashetania live. *Why was Nashetania still alive? Why hadn't he killed his captive?* There was no other way to explain it.

"What should the Princess do now?"

"I think perhaps Tgurneu plans on handing Nashetania over to Cargikk. Since I didn't make a contract with Cargikk, he would probably deal with Nashetania."

"...Is Fremy the seventh?" Goldof asked.

"I don't have any proof. But I think perhaps she is."

If he were one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers shouldering the fate of the world he should immediately meet up with Adlet and the others and tell them what he'd heard. And then he should interrogate Fremy and confirm whether she was genuine or not. But Goldof could not stop his advance towards the Lava Belt.

He was going to save Nashetania. That was the sole reason he was taking action.

"The information about Fremy will have to wait. I will save the princess. That's all I'm going to worry about."

He couldn't completely trust Dozzu. Dozzu was a Kyoma and an enemy of the Heroes of the Six Flowers. However in order to save Nashetania he had no choice but to cooperate with him.

At the very least, there was no mistaking the fact that Nashetania had been captured and was now in danger. His helmet wouldn't have activated if that wasn't the case.

Goldof recalled the time he had been given the helmet. By Nashetania, no less. Perhaps even the helmet was a part of her plans.

Even so Goldof continued to run. Perhaps Nashetania truly had fallen into danger. And if that were the case then Goldof had no choice but to keep on going. Even if it was a trap.

While running, he turned to check behind him. *I wonder what Adlet and the others are doing. I hope they leave me alone and just cross the valley.* He could accept falling into a trap if it was only him.

Before he knew it, the trees in the area grew sparse. The ground at his feet was covered with dark gray rocks and the weeds were getting fewer and fewer. Goldof had set foot into the Lava Belt.

#

*Goldof probably doesn't completely believe what I've said, Dozzu thought as he dangled from Goldof's hand. But that's enough. From the beginning I never thought that I could completely deceive him.*

Nevertheless, Goldof headed to the Lava Belt exactly as Dozzu and Nashetania had anticipated. So overall he was fulfilling their objective.

But now there was another problem.

*Will Goldof realize the truth? And if he does, when?* Dozzu wondered if he and Nashetania would be able to accomplish their plan. But all of that depended on Goldof.



### Chapter Five: Part One

Goldof and Dozzu continued across the Lava Belt. The view in the area was poor so they should have moved cautiously while remaining on the lookout for ambushes. However Goldof and Dozzu continued to run without any concern at all.

As they moved they took out many Kyoma that crossed their paths. And after each kill Goldof would rip open the Kyoma and search for Nashetania.

"You aren't finding her because she isn't in a place like that," Dozzu said.

Goldof had the same feeling. Nevertheless he had to rip open the Kyoma.

"More importantly have you received any word from Nashetania?"

"I haven't. Perhaps the princess is not in a situation where she can talk," Goldof said and then placed a hand on his helmet. Other than the ringing that notified him of Nashetania's capture he hadn't heard anything else.

Goldof already told Dozzu the information he'd received from the Helmet of Truth. Dozzu frowned when he heard that Nashetania was inside a Kyoma's stomach. It would be difficult to find out which Kyoma she was in. And without information from Nashetania, it was close to impossible to specify her location.

Goldof and Dozzu continued farther into the Lava Belt. As they climbed a rocky hill, they saw another large trapezoidal one.

"Over there. That is where Nashetania was carried off to."

The two of them quickly scaled the hill's slope and stood at the summit. At the center of the hill was a large basin and in the middle was a large amount of Kyoma corpses. None of them were moving. It seemed like Tgurneu and Nashetania had already moved to a different location.

"Were these your forces?" Goldof asked.

As Goldof descended the slope with Dozzu walking beside him, the Kyoma replied, "Everyone was brave. If I don't repay their actions and die, I wouldn't be able to rest in peace," Dozzu said as he walked about the slope with his nose near the ground. He smelled the ground with an audible sniffing sound.

"Could you wait a moment? I'm searching for where Nashetania headed."

Goldof nodded. He kept a watchful eye on his surroundings, making sure there was nothing to worry about. However with just his rudimentary search, he couldn't find anything. Over and over again he called to Nashetania through his helmet, but in the end there was no reply. While he restrained the panic in his mind, he waited for Dozzu to find something.

"I see. I haven't picked up Nashetania's scent, but I understand which way Tgurneu and his followers went. The remaining Kyoma are heading south. Perhaps Tgurneu is also among them."

"Understood. Let's hurry then," Goldof said then immediately started to run, Dozzu following behind him. "Tgurneu is going south, what do you think he is planning?"

"He's going to kill Nashetania after all. Since he can't kill her himself he will hand her over to one of Cargikk's followers and have them kill her instead."

"Is there any other possibility?"

"Or maybe he will take her hostage and use that to threaten you. Those are the only two ways of value that Tgurneu can use her."

"...I see."

Goldof thought about the possibilities as he used both his feet and hands to scale the steep slope. *Was Dozzu really telling the truth? Had Nashetania truly fallen into danger?*

Regardless there was no way that Goldof could stop. Nashetania might be killed. And if there was such a possibility then he had to head out to save her. If it was a trap then Goldof would only talk about how to cut through it.



After another fifteen minutes Goldof and Dozzu continued onward across the Lava Belt. Eventually Dozzu sniffed the ground and tilted his head to the side.

"What's wrong?"

"It's strange. The Kyoma are moving too slow. If Tgurneu intended on handing Nashetania over to one of Cargikk's subordinates then they should be traveling as fast as possible."

"What are you saying?"

"I don't know. Whatever Tgurneu is planning...at any rate we should soon catch up to him if we keep going at this speed."

Dozzu ran with his head tilted to the side. After they climbed the next rocky hill they could see a slightly open area. But what they found in the area astounded Goldof. There were about fifty Kyoma waiting to attack. It was clear that they had been waiting for Goldof and Dozzu to come.

But Goldof wasn't shocked by the multitudes of Kyoma. What he found astonishing was the fact that Nashetania was at the center of them all. She was playing with her rapier while straddling the back of a giant lizard Kyoma. Her armor was different than before, but she was without a doubt Nashetania.

"Princess!" Goldof shouted.

Wordlessly Nashetania pointed the tip of her rapier at Goldof. Then the Kyoma all at once charged in his direction.

At first he had doubted it, but in truth it was a trap. And from Dozzu's face, Goldof could tell that the small Kyoma also seemed flustered.

"Nashetania! Are you alright?!" Dozzu shouted and rushed over towards Nashetania.

The Kyoma rushing towards the group launched attacks on Dozzu. But jumping to the side and rolling across the ground, Dozzu dodged them all. Then a large amount of blades sprung up from the ground, grazing Dozzu's body and causing blood to spray out from the Kyoma's small body.

Goldof couldn't understand. *Even if this is a trap to kill me, why are they even trying to kill Dozzu?* Nashetania had said that Dozzu would never betray her and she would never betray Dozzu.

The Kyoma were drawing closer. Goldof readied his spear and repelled the Kyoma heading his way. But those Kyoma were not opponents that he could kill in just one strike. They were clearly different from the small-fry Kyoma he had fought with in the past. They were upper level Kyoma.

"Princess?! What's happening?" Goldof shouted.

But Nashetania didn't answer. Nashetania's blades just relentlessly attacked Dozzu. Wordlessly, she only continued to fight with a smile on her face.

Goldof's next question was whether Nashetania was an impostor or not. He'd heard from Adlet that there were those among the Kyoma that could freely change their appearance. But even if that were the case, they wouldn't be able to imitate Nashetania's ability to wield blades.

So in other words, the Nashetania before him was genuine.

However, Goldof's helmet was still ringing. Even at that moment the helmet was indicating that the Princess was still captured and still in danger.

But Goldof just couldn't understand the situation.

"What are you doing, Nashetania?! We came to help you! Don't you recognize us?!" Dozzu shouted as he evaded the Kyoma's attacks.

Then sparks scattered about from his horn, and with a thunder, lightning rushed about the area. With one strike two Kyoma fell to the ground, dead.

"Nashetania! Why?!"

As Dozzu tried to rush towards her, a blade hit him. It stabbed through his abdomen and jutted out through his back; impaling the Kyoma and making his body hang in the air off the blade. Dozzu twisted his body and wriggled himself off the blade. Then he distanced himself from Nashetania.

With his attention caught by Nashetania and Dozzu, Goldof didn't notice the Kyoma behind him and took a blow to the back. As he staggered from the blow three Kyoma rushed towards him from in front of him.

Goldof swung his spear high up in the air and positioned himself to strike down the Kyoma at the head of the pack. But instead he used the butt of his spear to stab a hole into the ground. Then throwing his weight into the spear, he lifted up his body and leaped high up into the sky. He flipped high through the air and landed behind the Kyoma. Then he charged towards Nashetania.

Of course he did not intend on killing her. After he killed the rock lizard Kyoma, he would hit her in the chin or the stomach to knock her out.

Nashetania giggled as blades sprung up from the ground and attacked Goldof.

His armor blocked the majority of them and the rest he knocked away with his spear. But just one of them went through Goldof's foot.

"Gaa!" Goldof grunted and collapsed to the ground.

The next moment the Kyoma came at him from all sides. Even so, Goldof reached out to Nashetania.

A blade then stabbed through his hand. His blood trailed down the metal and dripped to the ground.

*Why?* That was the question on Goldof's mind as he picked himself up and rolled to the side, dodging a Kyoma's attack. He could no longer approach Nashetania. The only thing he could do now was go on the defensive and escape.

"Princess!"

Without listening to Goldof, Nashetania smacked the stone lizard Kyoma's head beneath her as it sluggishly began to run, slowly taking Nashetania away from Goldof.

"Goldof-san! Please follow after Nashetania!" Dozzu shouted.

However a group of Kyoma were blocking Goldof's path while the other Kyoma followed behind Nashetania as they all headed north together.

"Where are you going?! Nashetania! Nashetania!"

Nashetania did not turn around to respond to Dozzu's pleas. She simply continued over a rocky hill until they couldn't see her anymore.

#

Surrounded by formidable Kyoma, it took close to thirty minutes to wipe them out. They couldn't leave earlier, since whenever they tried to chase after Nashetania the Kyoma would persistently hold them back.

Once all of the Kyoma had been killed, Goldof stared at Dozzu with eyes full of animosity.

"...What's going on, Dozzu?"

His Helmet of Truth was still signaling that the Princess was in danger. However, the Nashetania they'd just seen didn't seem to be captured.

"Goldof-san, is the Helmet of Truth still ringing?"

"Yeah."

"Then...Nashetania is still captured."

"...Explain now," Goldof said, taking out a needle and thread from his armor. Still standing upright, he quickly stitched up his wounds and applied a salve to stop the bleeding.

"Tgurneu's subordinates are called the Dark Specialists. Their fighting abilities are low, but instead, each one of them has a unique ability which cannot be imitated by any other Kyoma. Among them there might be a Kyoma that can control humans. The ability to control humans would be an extremely difficult situation for us, whether the cause is a Dark Specialist or otherwise."

"Are you saying the Princess is being controlled? Do you have any proof?"

"I don't. The abilities of the Dark Specialists are shrouded in mystery. But I can't think of any other possibility."

After hearing Dozzu, Goldof tried to head north and follow after Nashetania, but the pain from Nashetania's stab wound brought him to a stop. He took out a small iron bottle from his armor and drank it all in one gulp. The medicine was one of the Piena Royal Family's prized Saint Instruments that had been passed down over the years. The medicine did not heal injuries, but it made the user void of pain or exhaustion, forcing the body to fight against its own will. Half of it was a medicine, while half of it was a poison.

"How should we kill that human-controlling Kyoma?"

"Perhaps it's a Kyoma with an appearance close to a parasite. If we can remove the parasite from Nashetania's body then there shouldn't be any problem."

"At any rate...there's no choice but to capture the Princess, right?"

It was completely unexpected. Goldof couldn't believe that in order to save the Princess he would need to fight her. However it was still possible to save Nashetania since Goldof was certain that he was stronger than her in a one-on-one fight.

Goldof and Dozzu continued running north.

"Can you hear it, Goldof-san? Someone is fighting ahead of us to the north. I think Nashetania was captured around the basin over there."

"What was that? Who's fighting?"

Goldof strained his ears. The sound from his helmet made it difficult to hear, but he could faintly hear gunfire.

"It's them...I told them not to come..."

The Heroes had followed Goldof. In his mind Goldof cursed Adlet. *Why couldn't you have just left me alone and focused on trying to cross the valley?*

"The Six Flowers are probably fighting with Nashetania. We have to stop them. If things continue like this she will be killed," Dozzu said.



As they ran Goldof worried about the situation. Adlet and the others would without a doubt kill Nashetania. So in order to save her Goldof would have to fight them too. Goldof knew that they wouldn't forgive her. Even if she was being used by Tgurneu it did not change the fact that she was an enemy.

Ever since they had infiltrated the Wailing Demon Territory Goldof had feared this time would come. The time when he would have to protect Nashetania or protect his companions. The time when he would have to make a choice had finally arrived. Goldof stopped running. Since he was unable to come to a decision, he was unable to continue.

"Goldof-san, what are you going to do?" Dozzu asked. The Kyoma had also stopped and it seemed as if he was concerned, just as Goldof was.

"Nashetania and I both believe that you can't fight your companions. So if that's true then there's nothing we can do."

"Shut up," Goldof said.

Goldof then placed his hand on his chest. He recalled Nashetania's voice when she had used the Helmet of Truth to ask him for help. The fire was burning in his heart. It was shouting for him to kill all the people that would harm Nashetania. From the beginning he had known that he would have to completely annihilate all those who would harm Nashetania.

"Let's go, Dozzu. Let's save the Princess."

"Thank you so much. And at the same time, I'm so sorry," Dozzu said as he drew closer to Goldof's feet. "Goldof-san, how many times have you fought with Nashetania?"

Dozzu's sudden question confused Goldof. "One time at the Fighting Tournament, and the time before would be the second."

"And how many times has Nashetania run away from you?"

"...Why are you asking such a question?"

"...Forgive me. This is not the time for frivolous talk. Let's go," Dozzu said and then started to run.

There was something uneasy about Dozzu's expression. It seemed like the face of a person at their wits' end.

"What are you implying, Dozzu?"

"It's nothing."

After running for about five minutes, they suddenly noticed that the sounds from the faraway fight had stopped. But Goldof's helmet was still ringing, so Nashetania was definitely still alive.

From the distance they heard Mora's voice. **"Goldof! Goldof! Can you hear me? Chamo has been attacked by Nashetania!"**

Goldof unconsciously stopped.

**"Nashetania embedded a Saint Instrument inside Chamo's stomach and if we don't kill her then Chamo will be killed! Nashetania is running! Follow after her and kill her!"**

Goldof looked to Dozzu, but the Kyoma's face was twisted in a frown and his fur was standing on its ends.

"Somehow...it looks like the situation has just gotten worse."

#

Goldof was standing about two kilometers from the basin where Chamo was located.

He listened carefully as Mora explained what had happened with her mountain echoes. Due to the Blade Gem Nashetania inserted into Chamo's body, Chamo was slowly being killed. If they didn't kill Nashetania then Chamo would not be saved. Mora also explained that Nashetania was within a kilometer radius of the basin. And there were only about three hours until Chamo died.

Understanding the situation, Goldof gripped his spear tightly and aimed the tip at Dozzu.

"Is all that true, Dozzu?!"

"Wait a second, Goldof-san," Dozzu said, retreating backwards a step.

"...So your target wasn't me, but Chamo? You used me in order to lure the Six Flowers to this place, and then you activated the so-called Blade Gem. Is that true?!"

"No, you've got it all wrong. We did not insert the Blade Gem. You know that. Nashetania cannot create Saint Instruments."

"..."

"Tgurneu is trying to use Nashetania as a decoy. He is convincing Adlet-san and the others that Nashetania is the culprit in order to avert their eyes from the truth."

"That sounds..."

"Nashetania will be killed by Adlet-san. And in that opening the Blade Gem will kill Chamo. That is Tgurneu's objective," Dozzu said hastily as Goldof pressed him for answers.

"Please try to calmly think about it, Goldof-san. If Nashetania could use the Blade Gem or whatever then she would have used it earlier. If she had used it while she was running about the Illusion Fog Barrier then at the very least she would have been able to kill one person. Or she could have attacked Chamo-san before everyone had gathered and been able to assassinate her."

"...but."

"Nashetania didn't use it. And more importantly there isn't any proof, right?"

Still gripping his spear, Goldof stood perplexed. Is *Dozzu my enemy or my ally?* Goldof didn't know who his enemy was and who he should fight in order to protect Nashetania.

"In reality it was probably Fremy-san who put the Blade Gem into Chamo. She had fought with Chamo-san once before, although she lost. I don't know what kind of method she used, but at that time she must have inserted the Blade Gem into Chamo."

If he thought about it, it made sense. But Goldof could no longer trust Dozzu. The Helmet of Truth continued to ring, indicating that Nashetania was in trouble. But Goldof had no idea whether Nashetania had truly fallen into danger.

"I know at this point it is absurd to hope for you to trust me. But what I've said is the truth. And if things keep going the way they are then Nashetania will be killed by Adlet-san and the others."

"Shit!" Goldof shouted and then started to run.

The truth wasn't getting any clearer. However at the moment Nashetania was surely in danger. He had to save her.

At the time Goldof didn't think he was betraying the Six Flowers. He didn't intend on killing his companions. And at the same time that he was saving Nashetania he would be searching for a way to protect Chamo. However Goldof did not answer his companion Mora's call and chose to cooperate with his enemy Dozzu.

From an outsider's perspective, he was already nothing other than a traitor.

### Chapter Five: Part Two

Goldof could faintly hear explosions in the distance as he ran through the Lava Belt. It didn't take long to realize that they were Fremy's bombs. So Goldof and Dozzu changed directions and started to head west.

"I will act under the assumption that what you've said to me is true," Goldof said as he ran. "First, we will subdue the Princess. You eliminate the Kyoma that is manipulating her. Can you do it?"

Dozzu nodded. "I can handle it. Nashetania will just lose consciousness, but I can only do that if there are no enemies in the vicinity."

"If that's the case then I'll handle the enemies. After I've taken care of the Kyoma, you will take the Princess and leave the Blade Gem's range."

"Understood."

"Then Adlet and the others will realize that the Princess is not their enemy. And after that I will search for the true culprit who is using the Blade Gem so that I can save Chamo.

"This will probably be...a difficult fight," Dozzu muttered.

He was right. However, Goldof was not afraid. He kept telling himself that no matter what kind of enemy he faced he would win regardless.

But there was a possibility that in order to protect Nashetania he would need to fight with her directly. So before entering into battle there was something Goldof needed to confirm first.

"Dozzu. The concealing ability that the Princess uses. It can be broken by squinting one's eyes or harming one's self, right?" Goldof asked.

Dozzu's expression changed. He stared at Goldof's face with a pensive look. "That's right. You know a lot about it. That's good. Then I can save the time it would take to explain it."

Goldof didn't know whether or not Dozzu was truly pleased of his knowledge. He had no idea what the small Kyoma was thinking about.

"If the Princess isn't removed from the range of the Blade Gem then I'll consider you a liar. And then...I'll kill you. I'll definitely kill you."

"I understand."

After going over a rocky hill they neared towards the range of the Blade Gem. Nashetania was running alongside some Kyoma, and Goldof could see that Adlet,



Fremy, and Rolonia were following after her. However, it didn't seem like there were any other Heroes besides them in pursuit.

The Kyoma were attacking Adlet in an attempt to hold him off. But Rolonia's whip and Adlet's sword were able to take care of them easily. Then Goldof saw one of Fremy's bullets graze Nashetania's head and the muscles in his back grew stiff.

Nashetania was under attack and she was on the verge of being killed. The moment he saw that, the fire in his chest flared up. His sense of reason vanished and the desire to kill Adlet and the others welled up within him. Goldof placed a hand to his chest and desperately tried to suppress the urge.

"I will stop the Heroes. I'll stop the three of them...two at the very least. You subdue the Princess," Goldof said to Dozzu and then he ran.

"Goldof-san, be careful of that ability," Dozzu called out to him.

"Of course," Goldof replied.

"Please keep at it! Can't you run any faster?!" Nashetania was shouting. Her life was in danger.

Goldof had decided that he couldn't settle things by talking. He didn't have a way with words as Adlet did, and his companions doubted him. They probably wouldn't have even listened to what he had to say.

Goldof removed the chain from his wrist, which was used to prevent his spear from slipping from his hand. Then with all of his strength, he chucked the spear at Adlet as Dozzu rushed off to intercept Nashetania at the exact same moment.

After the spear had missed Adlet and landed on the ground in front of him, he and Rolonia headed towards Goldof while Fremy continued to chase after Rolonia. *I have to stop her*, Goldof thought and started to run after Fremy.

Fremy produced a bomb in her hand and threw it at him. But Goldof jumped to the side and weathered the explosion. He could feel the wound he received from Nashetania begin to hurt again.

"You think I'm going to allow you to hurt her?!"

Goldof barely dodged Adlet's poison needles, but at the same time Fremy had aimed her rifle at his chest. With his chest plate being the toughest part of his armor, it was able to stop the bullet. Nevertheless he was still flung backwards by the impact.

Goldof had to stop three of the Heroes of the Six Flowers. If he fought them half-heartedly, not only would he be intercepted, he would probably be killed. He had been prepared to get hurt, but now he had to fight.

"Fremy! Rolonia! Follow Nashetania! Leave him to me!" Adlet shouted.

"...I can't let you go."

Rolonia joined Fremy in chasing after Nashetania. Goldof desperately tried to follow them, but Adlet had attacked him from behind. Even though he was able to block one of Adlet's smoke pellets, Rolonia's whip and Fremy's bullets had relentlessly pummeled him down.

He was somehow managing to hold off Adlet and Rolonia with just his fists, but Fremy had distanced herself beyond his reach.

"Fremy! Don't worry about us! You cannot lose sight of Nashetania!" Adlet shouted.

Goldof once again tried to charge towards Fremy to stop her. But Rolonia stood in his way. So he was forced to give up on the possibility of stopping Fremy himself.

"I will leave Fremy to you!" He shouted towards Dozzu who was chasing after Nashetania. He had no choice but to entrust Fremy to Dozzu. He would stop Adlet and Rolonia.

"...You're in my way," Goldof said.

Adlet and Rolonia both spread their arms out wide. Adlet pulled the spear that Goldof had thrown out of the ground, assumed a fighting stance, and began to speak.

"Why, Goldof? Don't you understand what's happened? Chamo is slowly being killed. The only way to save her is to kill Nashetania. Didn't you hear Mora's mountain echoes?"

Of course he'd heard it. Goldof was taking action in response to it.

"Please stop, Goldof-san. We have to defeat Nashetania-san. That is the only way to save Chamo-san."

Rolonia was also trying to get through to him. *They are nice people*, Goldof thought. Even now he was hesitant about killing them. And just fighting them gave him a faint sense of guilt.

"Goldof, talk to us. You are somehow being deceived by someone."

"Goldof-san, don't you think this is the same as with Mora-san? Haven't you fallen into some kind of trap and being forced to fight us? Am I wrong?"

Adlet and Rolonia took turns trying to reason with him.

Perhaps what they were saying was correct. Goldof might have just been deceived. Nevertheless stopping the fight was something that Goldof couldn't do.

If he were to let them leave that place Nashetania would undoubtedly be killed. Even if she were an enemy, and even if she were a traitor to mankind, Goldof wanted Nashetania to live.

*Discard your confusion*, Goldof told himself. *If you hesitate, you won't be able to beat them.*

"I will not let you go any further."

"Goldof."

"If you plan on going... then you'll have to kill me."

The moment Adlet heard those words his gaze changed. All of the kindness and softness he'd had up until then vanished. *He intends to kill me*, Goldof thought as he prepared himself for the inevitable confrontation.

He would have to hold the two of them at bay until Dozzu had gotten rid of the Kyoma that was manipulating Nashetania. At the moment it was the only thing he could do.

Goldof was definitely at a disadvantage: it was two against one. Plus Goldof's spear was in Adlet's hands. Nevertheless Goldof was not afraid.

And soon the fight began.

#

Rolonia's shouts echoed through the Lava Belt.

"Traitor, die, die, die, die, the traitor will not live to see tomorrow!"

Rolonia's whip cracked again and again across Goldof's armor. If his actual flesh was touched then his life would be over. Meanwhile as he withstood Rolonia's onslaught, Goldof reached out to his spear in Adlet's hands. Adlet thrust at him with the spear and kicked in an attempt to keep Goldof from stealing back the weapon.

His eyes burned from the smoke pellets. And Rolonia's whip sent jolts of pain throughout his injuries. Nevertheless Goldof continued to fight.

*Perhaps somewhere in their minds Adlet and Rolonia are hesitating too, Goldof thought as he fought. Do they think it's a good idea to kill me or are they unsure?*

Even though he was fighting, Goldof's eyes looked out in the direction to where Nashetania had gone. *I wonder if Dozzu was able to do his tasks well. Did he stop Fremy and get rid of the Kyoma that was manipulating Nashetania? Or is Dozzu also in trouble?* At the moment Goldof could do nothing but pray for Dozzu's success.

"Adlet, don't kill the Princess," Goldof said while he fought.

Though Adlet had definitely heard what he'd said, it didn't seem like he was listening.

"Why, why, why, won't you die?! Don't touch Ad-kun! Don't touch Fremy, don't touch Chamo. Die!"

As Rolonia shouted and lashed her whip at him, Goldof dodged her attacks. His evasion created an opening, so he moved to steal the spear again from Adlet. In response Adlet took one of his hands off the spear, reached to his side, and took out one of his secret weapons. Suddenly Goldof grabbed Adlet's hand and wrenched the poison dart free from it.

He then chunked the dart at Rolonia's face while at the same time taking back his spear. Goldof recalled what Dozzu had said to him earlier. Fremy was the seventh and she was the one who had put the Blade Gem into Chamo. As the battle concluded, Goldof wondered about conveying this information to the two heroes.

"Listen well. The Princess is not your enemy. Fremy is," Goldof said and then he thrust the butt end of the spear into Adlet's gut.

*They probably won't be able to move for a while. So this should be enough to stop them,* Goldof thought as he finished the fight. It was good that they didn't interfere with him helping Nashetania. If they did then he would have a reason to kill them.

More importantly he needed to go and back up Dozzu. At the moment he had no clue what was going on with him.

Goldof ran in the direction Nashetania had gone to. After climbing a rocky hill he saw Fremy fighting with the Kyoma that Nashetania had been with before. But Nashetania was nowhere to be found, and neither was Dozzu.

"I couldn't have wished for more," Goldof muttered.

There were two ways in which he benefited from the situation. Fremy wouldn't be able to move for a while and the Kyoma that surrounded Nashetania would not get in his way. So Goldof proceeded past Fremy and continued to run in a clockwise arc.

As he ran he thought about what he would do when he caught up with Nashetania. First he would render her unconscious. Then he would remove the alleged human-controlling Kyoma from her body. And after that he would take her out of the effective range of the Blade Gem. If she left the area then at least for the time being she wouldn't be killed by Adlet and the others.

But if what Dozzu had said was a lie and the person who had put the Blade Gem into Chamo was actually Nashetania herself then he would kill Dozzu, restrain Nashetania, and take her out of the effective range. His actions would be helping both Nashetania and Chamo.

"I won't let you die Princess, nor you Chamo," Goldof muttered.



During his pursuit the Helmet of Truth had never stopped ringing. Nashetania was still in danger. After running for about half a circle, Goldof found Dozzu. And ahead of him Nashetania was running by herself.

"Dozzu!"

"Over here!" Dozzu replied.

It took ten minutes for Goldof to catch up with him. And he was quite close to being able to catch Nashetania as well.

"I was held up, but just for a little while," Goldof said as they chased after Nashetania.

"I knew someone like you could handle them," Dozzu said with a laugh.

Nashetania was scaling up a steep slope of a slightly elevated rocky hill as Goldof and Dozzu chased right behind her. Goldof was using both of his hands and feet to crawl up the hill. *I'll catch up to her around the summit*, Goldof thought.

"Goldof-san, I'll keep her from moving with my lightning strikes. Can you pin her down and apply pressure to her carotid artery to make her fall unconscious?"

"Understood."

They reached the summit and at the very top was a giant basin. Nashetania was standing in the center of the hollow with her sword poised and ready to meet Goldof and Dozzu's attacks. Goldof kicked off the stone hill with all his strength and charged at Nashetania.

But something felt off, and trusting his guts Goldof immediately dodged to the side.

Lightning struck right where Goldof had been a moment earlier. Dozzu had shot a bolt of lightning at his back and it would have killed him had he been struck by it.

"You missed?" Nashetania asked as she swung her sword.

Goldof rolled to the side and dodged a blade that emerged from the ground. Then he dodged a second lightning strike from Dozzu.

One after another, lightning from behind and blades from the ground came at Goldof.

Goldof wasn't surprised. On the contrary he figured that a trap like this would have happened. Everything had been a lie. Nashetania and Dozzu had tricked him and all along they had intended to kill him after they were done using him.

Nashetania had never been captured by Tgurneu. She was the one who had placed the Blade Gem into Chamo. Which meant that the idea of Tgurneu's Kyoma controlling Nashetania had also been a lie.

Nashetania's aim was to lure the Six Flowers to her location. Then she would use the Blade Gem to kill Chamo and after making Goldof lower his guard she would kill him with a surprise attack.

That was the truth and it was exactly what he'd anticipated.

"Dozzu! Don't let Goldof get away!" Nashetania shouted.

Large sparks emitted from Dozzu's horn. The biggest lightning strike yet then lashed out towards Goldof.

*I can't dodge it,* Goldof realized and flung his spear.

Thunder echoed throughout the area. The lightning struck the spear but did not reach Goldof. However the shock wave from the explosion scorched Goldof's body. It was the first time in his life that he'd been electrocuted and the pain knocked him down to the ground, causing him to tumble down the basin slope.

As he fell Nashetania conjured blades to attack him, but they had barely missed his vital organs.

"Guwaaa!" Goldof screamed in pain while tumbling down the basin.

Strangely, he wasn't angry at all. He wasn't upset about being tricked. From the beginning he and Nashetania had been enemies. So Goldof was more at fault for being deceived than anything.

Goldof saw that Dozzu was preparing a final lightning strike, but before it was released he had been able to grab one of Nashetania's blades from the ground as he rolled. With blood spilling down his fingers he snapped the blade and hurled it at the small Kyoma. The blade grazed his face, causing the lightning to veer away and barely missing Goldof.

Goldof then charged at Nashetania, but the blades springing up at his feet blocked his path and pierced his sides. Blood poured from Goldof's mouth as his body burned from the lightning. Slowly his entire body grew numb, beginning to lose its ability to move.

Nevertheless Goldof continued to fight. Even at a time like this he couldn't think about killing Nashetania. Protecting Nashetania was the only thing he could ever think about.

Dozzu and Nashetania stopped their attacks. They were both out of breath.

"...He doesn't seem human," Nashetania said among ragged breaths.

"You are still standing, even though you were surrounded by Kyoma, attacked by Adlet-san and the others, and even ambushed by our surprise attack. You are an unimaginable monster."

Goldof smiled faintly, slightly pleased by the compliment.

"I have a request, Goldof. I was wondering if you would die peacefully for us," Nashetania said with a malicious smile.

"If I kill you and am able to keep running until Chamo-san dies then we'll be only one step away from victory. And if we can kill just one more person then Tgurneu and Cargikk will become our servants."

"...Princess."

"Die, Goldof, and help us."

For a while Goldof looked to the side. And after staring at his feet, he said, "Certainly. As you wish, my Princess."

"What?"

"Goldof-san?" Both Nashetania and Dozzu looked shocked.

At the same time Goldof moved. He kicked a rock at his feet as hard as he could, causing the stone to break into pieces and strike Nashetania's face.

"Sometimes..."

It all happened within a moment. Goldof suddenly ran towards Nashetania, somersaulting over the blades as they sprung up from the ground, and then tripped her. Breaking her balance, Goldof grabbed Nashetania's face and smashed her to the ground with all his might.

"...I also lie."

Nashetania took one more breath then stopped moving. He wasn't going to let her die, but he was going to stop her from moving for at least a little while.

Goldof stood up and glared at Dozzu. All that was left now was to kill that last Kyoma.

Within his heart he could feel the dark fire flaring up more than ever before. This was the only Kyoma that he couldn't allow to live.

Sparks scattered from Dozzu's horn just as Goldof had torn off one of his gauntlets and chucked it towards Dozzu to divert the bolt. However just that one gauntlet wasn't enough to completely block the lightning. And even though Goldof leaped back his body was still scorched by the sparks.

"Haa!" Dozzu shouted, gathering all his energy into his body. The horn on his forehead then released even bigger sparks. In the next instant the biggest lightning strike yet was released from his horn.

The moment Goldof saw it he rolled to the side. But even though he had been able to avoid the direct strike, the shockwave from the lightning travelled through his armor and burned his body.

Even now, with the battle one on one, Dozzu was not an easy opponent. If Goldof had waited to see the lightning before moving, he wouldn't have been able to dodge them in time. So in order to avoid the attacks he had no choice but to get out of Dozzu's range. However, doing that, he would lose all means of attack.

Common sense told him that he should probably escape, but instead Goldof ran right towards Dozzu.

"...Fool."

As Goldof dodged Dozzu's lightning strike, Goldof had kicked a rock towards him. However the Kyoma easily dodged it.

"I've seen that trick before," Dozzu said. Then without a moment's delay he hit Goldof's body with a string of successive attacks. And when they were done, Goldof slowly fell to the ground.

"You're finished."

To Dozzu it probably looked like Goldof was crumbling powerless to the ground. But just as his face was going to touch the ground, he made his move.

Goldof had both of his hands placed on the ground, and in his right hand he was holding a rock. Using his left hand and both of his feet Goldof then flung himself forward.

Goldof had seen through Dozzu's fighting style. Perhaps if Dozzu had released all of his energy at once he could have produced a lightning strike that would have killed him in one blow. But Dozzu only attacked him with enough force to keep him confined to one place.

Goldof figured that after the Kyoma released its bolt of electricity, he would need time to gather energy before firing the second strike. And that was Goldof's plan. He was going to strike in the moment between Dozzu's first and the second attacks. He let himself get hit by the first, wagering both his body and his will on his strategy.

"What?!" Dozzu shouted.

At the same time Goldof crushed the stone in his hand and chucked the fragments at Dozzu. The broken shards pierced Dozzu's eyes. And as he tried to retreat backwards, Goldof reached out and grabbed him. He then picked up the Kyoma's small body and slammed him to the ground with everything he had left.



"U, gaa!"

As he was smashed into the ground Dozzu's legs lifted up into the air. But upon striking the ground his legs bounced back in recoil. Goldof could feel the unpleasant sensation of bones breaking in his hands.

"Uh, uuuu...." Dozzu moaned and Goldof released the small Kyoma.

Dozzu tried to drag itself along the ground away from Goldof as he picked up the spear he'd dropped onto the slope. With the spear at ready, Goldof approached the crippled Kyoma and positioned his spear to give the finishing blow. But something floated in the back of Goldof's mind.

"Dozzu is my comrade." He recalled that when Nashetania had said Dozzu's name, she seemed to have a proud expression.

"The same ambition burns within us and we are fighting together. I will not betray Dozzu by any means and Dozzu would never betray me."

"..."

Goldof lowered his spear. *The Princess would definitely be sad if I killed Dozzu. Dozzu can't go anywhere. I should let him go.*

"The Princess is more important," Goldof said, turning from the Kyoma and walking towards Nashetania.

Nashetania's eyes had completely rolled back into her head and it didn't seem like she was faking unconsciousness. If he picked up her unconscious body and ran for just five minutes they would be able to leave the effective range of the Blade Gem. That would probably save Chamo, which would also end the current fight.

*What should I do now? Should I return to where Adlet and the others are, or should I take Nashetania and escape?* Although those questions crossed his mind, he had no time to think about what was ahead. For now, he would try and take her away from the effective range.

With that decision in mind, Goldof extended his hand to Nashetania.

"...Goldof." Goldof could hear the Princess's voice coming from the Helmet of Truth.

"Huh?"

*She had been unconscious just a moment ago. So why am I hearing her voice from the helmet?* The moment he realized the reason, he took a giant leap backwards.

The next instant a number of blades sprung up from the ground and attacked him. If Goldof's dodge had been a bit slower he would have been skewered and killed.

More blades emerged from the ground as he ran about, hitting them away with his spear.

*How is Nashetania able to use the power of blades while unconscious? Why am I hearing Nashetania's voice from the Helmet of Truth?*

The answer was clear. The Nashetania that was in front of him was a fake.

The blade attack stopped. Then right before his eyes the Nashetania in front of him transformed into a lanky monkey-like Kyoma. A metamorphosis Kyoma.

But what was strange was that even as the monkey's true form appeared, it still had the left arm of a human.

"Didn't I say before that you are really a monster? Regardless of the fact that you were able to avoid Dozzu's surprise attack, how were you able to dodge my attack just now?"

The voice was coming from the ground and from the earth a thin, long snake-like Kyoma appeared. Its skin was composed of silver metal pieces and scales. Then the snake Kyoma spoke.

"Ah, I see. The real Nashetania teased people I went too far with my impersonation of Nashetania. The real teased people excessively. She is a truly sarcastic person."

Goldof had heard that tone and way of speaking before. It had been in the Valley of Spilled Blood."

"...Tgurneu?"

"Aah, I've been found out. Well, that's fine. Hello, Goldof-kun."

The snake Kyoma...Tgurneu stuck its tongue out and flicked it in laughter.

"What do you think? Didn't I make a good imitation? Not only was I able to deceive Adlet and the others but you too."

Tgurneu's words didn't reach Goldof's ears. But the fact that Nashetania was an impostor made his back grow stiff.

Even now the Helmet of Truth continued to ring, indicating that Nashetania was in danger. And now Goldof understood the reason. The real Nashetania had been captured and was being held somewhere.

"Where is the Princess?" Goldof pointed his spear at Tgurneu.

"Are you really asking where the Princess is? Well, where do you think she is, Goldof-kun?"

The metallic snake stared at Goldof as if it were running its tongue all over his face.

"Where is the Princess, Tgurneu?!" Goldof shouted and lunged with his spear.

Tgurneu merely showed an unpleasant smile and easily dodged Goldof's attack.

"Isn't it obvious that I won't tell you? No matter how much of a fool you may be, you probably understand that much," Tgurneu said.

Goldof recalled all of the events that had occurred up until that point. He'd heard the request from the Helmet of Truth and headed off to save Nashetania. He encountered Dozzu and finally arrived at the Lava Belt. He'd heard that Chamo was being killed by the Blade Gem. Then he was attacked by Dozzu and the fake Nashetania.

He couldn't understand what was going on. Who was he being deceived by, who were his allies, who were his enemies, he didn't know anything. His mind was confused and he felt like he was about to scream.

"...Kuhuhu, huhuhu, ahahahahaha!" Tgurneu laughed, his head pointed up towards the heavens. "You really are stupid, huh? I've known you were stupid all this time, but I never thought you could possibly be this stupid."

Flapping his tongue, Tgurneu drew close towards Goldof's face. Then his tongue tickled Goldof's cheek. It was as if he were being petted like some adorable animal.

"You are incompetent. Hopelessly incompetent. I have a hard time understanding why Nashetania trusts you at all."

"...You bastard."

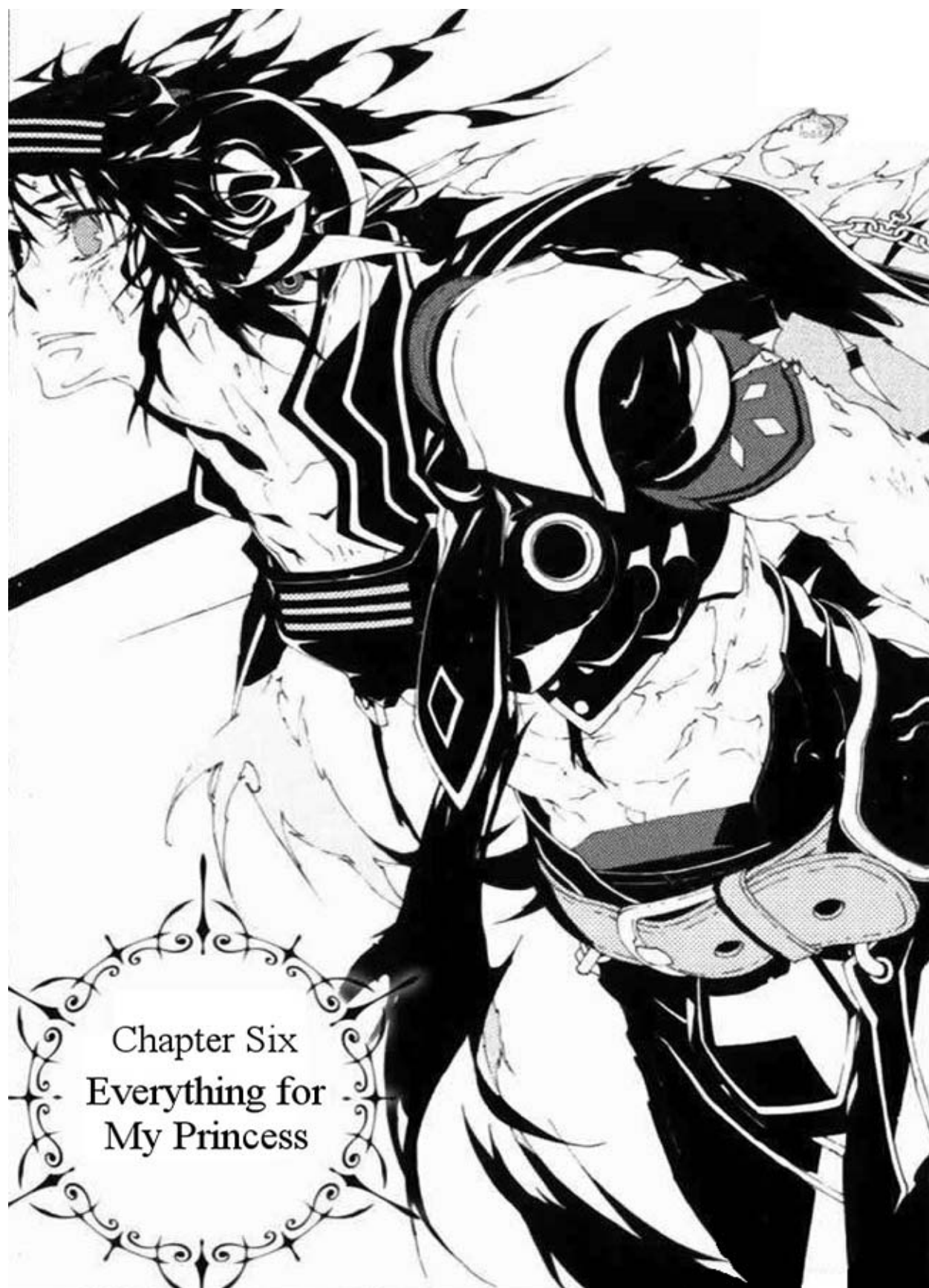
"It was amusing to see you deceived. In fact, you were so extremely easy to fool that I actually wondered whether you were plotting something."

Near Goldof's face, Tgurneu smiled.

"But now I want to tell you the truth. Because if things continue the way they are then I will end up killing Chamo and Nashetania and that won't be any fun for me at all."

"The truth?"

"You should thank me. What I'm about to tell you is the unadulterated truth. It's a rare occurrence for me to tell the whole truth. In fact, it's the first time I've done it in years."





### Chapter Six: Part One

When Goldof encountered Tgurneu, Mora was in the middle of the basin packed with Kyoma corpses. She had her hand on Chamo's back and continued to pour energy into the girl's body as blood endlessly poured out of Chamo's mouth. Hans ran about the basin, cutting up any Kyoma that was trying to get at Chamo.

"Obachan, it hurts so much. Will it be any longer?" Chamo asked as blood spilled from her mouth.

"Don't worry. Soon Adlet and the others will catch up to Nashetania. An opponent like Nashetania will be no match for the three of them."

"Aha, that's right. That's right....so it's good," Chamo said with a smile.

Mora didn't know anything. She didn't know the trouble Adlet had fallen into, nor did she know about the threat facing Goldof.

#

At that time Adlet was about 1.5 kilometers from Chamo's basin. He was fighting the Kyoma alongside Fremy and Rolonia.

The three of them hadn't noticed anything. They didn't know that the Nashetania they were chasing was a fake, nor did they know who the mastermind was behind their battle. They didn't know anything.

#

It was also that at this exact same time Nashetania was inside the stomach of a Kyoma.

It was cramped, hard to breathe, and extremely hot. Sweat was relentlessly being squeezed out from her body. On top of that there was a slimy warm sticky liquid coating her flesh.

Nashetania had been gruesomely injured. Her left arm was ripped off at the shoulder, and only a simple rope was used to stop the bleeding of the wound. Tentacles were wrapped around her throat and crushing her trachea and vocal cords. She could also feel the burrowed out wound in her back where a large maggot Kyoma was wiggling its face into her body.

Nashetania tried to scream. However only labored breaths escaped from her throat .

The only thing Nashetania could do within the Kyoma's stomach was wait for Goldof to come and save her. Goldof would see through Tgurneu's plan and find her wherever she may be.

But if Goldof's help did not come in time, then Nashetania's life would be over.

#

"The truth is quite simple," Tgurneu said quietly. "Dozzu and I are at odds with one another. Nashetania is Dozzu's pawn and the other seventh is mine. Until the Illusion Fog Barrier battle occurred I didn't know Dozzu's plan, nor did he know about my other seventh. That is the complete truth. Well, I should also mention that it's true we established a pact two hundred years ago."

Tgurneu continued with his story.

He talked about how after losing in the Illusion Fog Barrier, Nashetania jumped into the ocean and swam for a day, eventually reaching the Forest of Severed Fingers and meeting up with Dozzu.

At around that time Dozzu had gone off to negotiate with Cargikk. He was going to propose a pact to stop the fighting between their factions. If Nashetania failed then he would need to prepare for the possibility that he could not kill three of the Six Flowers. However Cargikk refused Dozzu's proposal and sent his elite subordinates to go and eliminate the small Kyoma.

"Dozzu and his followers ran around the Forest of Severed Fingers. His followers were injured, Nashetania was injured, and in the end they were cornered with no way of escape. Then this morning they came to me seeking help."

It was then that Dozzu told Tgurneu that he and Nashetania had inserted a Blade Gem into Chamo's stomach. And with those blades they would kill Chamo and then give the point to Tgurneu if in exchange Tgurneu protected them.

Tgurneu accepted their proposal. He too had experienced difficulty dealing with Chamo. So there was no reason for him to refuse the chance to get the point for killing her.

Then Tgurneu killed all of Cargikk's followers that he'd sent. The basin where Chamo was with all of the Kyoma corpses was the site of the battle between Cargikk's followers and Tgurneu's pawns.

Having wiped out the nuisances, they quickly worked out a strategy to kill Chamo and began making preparations.

"...But..." Dozzu interrupted, dragging his body across the ground before finally pulling himself up. "Tgurneu never intended on protecting us. After killing Chamo-san, he planned to get rid of us since we had already served our purpose."

Tgurneu didn't deny the accusation. He just smiled.

*Dozzu knew that Tgurneu would betray him, so why didn't he run?* Goldof wondered just as the answer popped into his mind. And when he finally realized what was going on he instantly despaired at how foolish he was for not realizing the truth until the last moment.

Nashetania had been taken hostage and Dozzu had been doing what Tgurneu told him to do. Deceiving Goldof and trying to kill him were both Tgurneu's will.

It was a truly messed up situation. The Kyoma deceived one another, killed one another, and at same time used one another.

Tgurneu continued to explain.

In the beginning, Tgurneu restrained Nashetania and forced Dozzu to obey him. Then one of his Dark Kyoma, number 31, a maggot with the power to block Saint abilities, used its power to block Nashetania's power of Blades.

After that, in order to deceive Adlet and the others he created an impostor.

The deception involved two separate Kyoma. One was a metamorphosis Kyoma that transformed to look like Nashetania. And the other one was a snake Kyoma that possessed the ability to wield blades. The snake Kyoma would then attack from the ground with its blades and it would seem as if it were using the Saint ability.

Pretending to be the Saint of Blades was not something a Kyoma could do with superficial abilities. So Tgurneu fed his own body to the snake and increased its strength.

Until just a few days ago the metamorphosis Kyoma had been lurking within the Piena palace so that it would know Nashetania's way of speaking and mannerisms well. It learned to emulate Nashetania so well that it could even fool Adlet and Goldof.

However, the problem was Rolonia. If she licked the impostor's blood then it would be revealed whether they were real or not. So Tgurneu drew out Nashetania's blood and ripped off her left arm. The metamorphosis Kyoma attached that left arm to its body and poured her blood over it. Then it let Rolonia taste Nashetania's blood as it flowed through her genuine left arm. As a result even Rolonia wasn't able to realize that the impostor wasn't the real Nashetania.

"The Princess'...her left arm...bastard...you bastard..."

Goldof's entire body was shaking in rage. Paying him no heed, Tgurneu continued on with his story.

It was simple to lure the Six Flowers. Once captured, the Helmet of Truth would convey to Goldof that Nashetania was in danger. And exactly according to Tgurneu's plan Goldof came. After him the other Heroes followed Goldof to the Lava Belt. Tgurneu then commanded Dozzu to deceive Goldof, separate the companions, and manipulate the situation until Goldof ended up fighting with the other Flowers. And after all that was done, Dozzu was ordered to kill him.

Tgurneu placed a Kyoma into Dozzu's body which would transmit information back to him. Which meant that Tgurneu overheard everything that Dozzu and

Goldof had said to one another. So with Nashetania taken hostage, Dozzu couldn't do anything else other than obey Tgurneu's orders.

"So what do you think? Don't you think even a fool like yourself should be able to understand the situation after such a kind and thorough explanation?"

"The Princess, where is she? Speak, Tgurneu."

Tgurneu laughed scornfully at Goldof. "The real Nashetania is somewhere in the Lava Belt. Among my pawns there are Kyoma that can hide things very well." Tgurneu drew his face closer to Goldof. "Where is she? What kind of ability was used to hide her? Don't you think I can't tell you that? At the longest I estimate there are two more hours until Chamo dies, and I plan on continuing to hide Nashetania throughout that time."

"Give her back!"

"I refuse. I told her that if she tries to escape I will kill her. If she deactivates the Blade Gem on her own then I will kill her. If Dozzu tries to take her or even attack me just once, I will kill her. I can kill her just as easily with only a hint of a signal."

"You, will not, kill the Princess."

"That's not true. Isn't it obvious that's not true? Do you even know what you're saying?"

"Give me back the Princess."

"I'm saying no. But I will tell you what I'm going to do next. I plan on killing Nashetania the very instant Chamo dies. But you don't care, right? She is your enemy, after all."

Tgurneu stared at Goldof with the widest smile spread across his face.

"Actually I thought this plan of mine would hurt you the most. But there was a chance you could have discovered the true Nashetania if Adlet or Hans had learned about the information you received through the helmet."

"So I separated you from the Heroes and made it so that you wouldn't be able to combine your information. Really, I didn't have to even do that much since you willingly broke away from the Heroes on your own."

Goldof was grinding his teeth.

"You were deceived so often, Goldof. In fact I heard all of your conversations with Dozzu, and to be honest I found it difficult containing my laughter. Even though I had ordered him to kill you, I never thought that you Goldof would actually try and kill Adlet and the others."

Tgurneu moved away from Goldof's face, then stabbed Dozzu with a blade that grew out from his body.



"Dozzu, I understand what your objective was. You intended to have Goldof-kun save Nashetania for you, right?"

Goldof was taken aback as Dozzu nodded slightly.

"I knew that was your plan. After all, if you think about it that was just about the only way all of you could have survived. But, as I expected, Goldof-kun is incompetent. It is simply impossible for him to save Nashetania by any means. Chamo is going to die and so will all of you right here. And then that will be the end of it."

Dozzu glared at Tgurneu. However, Tgurneu paid him no heed at all.

"Hey, do you know why I am telling you the truth so candidly?" This time Tgurneu faced Goldof.

"Why?"

"Because even if I talked with you, it wouldn't be a problem. If you were to tell Adlet and the others what I told you, I could just kill Nashetania."

Goldof tensed.

"Of course that would mean I would be unable to kill Chamo. But just the threat is sufficient enough because I understand that you will never be able to abandon Nashetania. Besides, originally I had another method I was going to use to kill Chamo. So even if this current strategy fails, it wouldn't cause any major problems.

Plus the seventh will tell me if you talk. So what I'm telling you now is not a bluff. If you talk I will definitely kill Nashetania."

"...The Princess...the Princess..."

"Do you want to save Nashetania? If so, then it would be better to hurry. Adlet and the others are searching for her. Perhaps they may be able to find her."

"If...Adlet finds...the Princess..."

"Huhuhu. Naturally he will kill her." Laughing, Tgurneu drew closer to Goldof.  
"Say, Goldof-kun. Show me your face."

"...What?"

"I like to look at human faces," Tgurneu said and then he once again stared into Goldof's face. "Faces show me various things. Anger, panic, sadness, despair, and even when a person clings to that tiny glimmer of hope."

Goldof didn't say a word in response.

"I like human emotions. If I do a greeting I can connect to their hearts. If I speak with them we can understand one another. If I see their face then I'll be able to figure out what they are thinking. I like to feel the emotions of the people I will defeat. It is for that reason that I fight and for that reason that I am living."

Tgurneu stuck out his tongue and once again he licked Goldof's cheek.

"Now, it wouldn't bring me any joy if I kill you. I want to see your suffering, your confusion, and your regret. I have given you the hope that you can save Nashetania so I would like to see the despair on your face when you are unable to accomplish that feat."

Tgurneu seemed to have abandoned all sense of caution as he taunted Goldof. And as he looked at his face, the thought of killing Tgurneu crossed Goldof's mind.

"That's a good face. You...no...all of the Heroes of the Six Flowers are such wonderful spectacles."

Dozzu then spoke, "You must not kill Tgurneu. If you do then Nashetania will be killed at the exact same time as he falls."

Goldof could do nothing but grudgingly accept Dozzu's words as he put up with Tgurneu's taunts.

"Say, Goldof-kun. Do you think that you can save Nashetania? You weren't able to figure out my plan at all. On top of that you're absolutely worn out from your fight with Dozzu. You probably can't fight any more."

"...You..."

"To make matters worse, you are isolated and helpless. You fought against Adlet and the others. So if they see you now they will probably come and kill you immediately. You have been truly foolish."

"...Goldof-san," Dozzu said, in a pained voice.

"Ah, that's a good face. You really are incompetent. And I like the faces of powerless people."

Tgurneu pulled his face away from Goldof. At that time a Kyoma with a crow's head and a yeti's body approached Tgurneu.

The Yeti Kyoma thrust its hand into Tgurneu's throat. And from his throat it pulled out a fig fruit and bit it. Then the yeti Kyoma became the new Tgurneu. After that it crushed the neck of the Snake Kyoma, the body that Tgurneu had used up until then. Tgurneu probably had no further use for it.

"Well then, it's about time I ran away. It would be good for you to run as well Goldof-kun. Adlet and the others will be coming soon."

Goldof looked towards the hills. Adlet was surely chasing after him. And if he reached Goldof's location he would find him.

"Dozzu. Scorch this area with lightning. After you're done with that, rest for a while and heal your injuries. I know about your healing abilities. You'll be able to fight after an hour or so, right? After that, go and kill Hans and those with him. I will not allow you to refuse."

"...I have no choice...but to obey."

"That's right. Well, see you, Goldof-kun," Tgurneu said and left the area.

Goldof stood paralyzed in astonishment. He had come in order to save Nashetania. And he had intended to crush whatever enemy in order to do so.

But in reality he had just continued to dance in the palm of Tgurneu's hand.

*Incompetent*, the word reverberated through Goldof's mind. But it was not something that he could deny.

"Goldof-san," Dozzu called out to him.

"Dozzu. Is what Tgurneu said true?" Goldof asked.

"Excluding one point, everything was the truth."

"Just one?"

Dozzu stared into Goldof's eyes and said clearly, "You are not incompetent. There isn't a knight anywhere in the world that's half as great as you are. It is certainly not impossible for you to save Nashetania."

"...But..."

"At the moment I cannot help Nashetania. No one can, except for you."

"...I..."

"I promise you. If you save Nashetania I will immediately release Chamo-san. That is not a lie."

"....Is that true?"

"Now please run. If you stay here you will be killed by Adlet-san and the others. You are our only hope. You are the only chance Nashetania has to be saved."

After that Goldof walked away. He headed towards outside the perimeter of the Blade Gem. His body hurt, and it was even painful to move. The spear he carried in his hands felt extremely heavy.

*I will save the Princess.* That thought was now the only thing rushing within his mind.

#

Goldof could not run any more. His arms and legs had been pierced by the impostor Nashetania's blades, and his armor had been hit by Rolonia's whip and Fremy's bullets. Also his body had been burned by Dozzu's electricity. And he was terribly exhausted.

He desperately advanced through the Lava Belt, and after distancing himself about three kilometers from Chamo's position his feet stopped. Due to his burns his throat was dry. It seemed like he was going to die of pain and thirst.

"...Princess."

He found a geyser and approached it. For the time being he tried to treat his thirst. But the instant that he tried to drink, a terrible pain rushed through his tongue and nose. Goldof grunted and threw up hot water.

He then fell to his knees, no longer able to move.

First he had to treat his burns. He would not be able to keep on living if he didn't. Then he would treat the injuries he'd sustained from Dozzu. He didn't have a lot of medicine on hand, but it was better than nothing.

Goldof turned around. He had to quickly return to the Lava Belt and save Nashetania. And he had to do so before Chamo died, or before Adlet and the others found him.

He had a mountain of things he needed to do. Nevertheless his body didn't move. All of a sudden he sensed a presence behind him. There were about ten Kyoma staring at Goldof and licking their lips.

"Did you give up, Goldof?" a Kyoma asked.

"I will...protect the Princess."

Goldof readied his spear and stood to his feet. With a body that felt as heavy as lead, he fought back. Each time he took a break his throat hurt. Each time he moved a limb his entire body hurt.

The pain, the burns, the exhaustion: they were all taking their toll on Goldof and as they ate away at his energy his hopes of saving Nashetania started to fade as well.

"I've got you!"



A giant earthworm Kyoma wrapped itself around Goldof. The knight cut off its head, but even dead it still continued to squeeze his body.

Then a dog Kyoma rushed towards him, aiming to bite Goldof's neck. Goldof dodged it and knocked it away with his fist.

"I...will...protect...the Princess," Goldof muttered.

He said the words in order to encourage himself, but despair was slowly creeping up on him.

*I wonder if I can find Nashetania.* Tgurneu had said that a Kyoma's power was being used to hide her. And his voice had confidently declared that Goldof wouldn't be able to find her.

*Can I see through Tgurneu's plan? I don't have the intelligence of Adlet or Hans. Nor do I have the knowledge regarding the Kyoma as Fremy does. What could I possibly do?*

"You, Goldof!"

Goldof shook off the earthworm Kyoma, but the dog Kyoma had bit his leg. Even though he had stabbed it through its core with his spear, its fangs would not detach from his armor.

Aiming for that opening, the remaining Kyoma rushed towards Goldof. So Goldof dragged the dog Kyoma's corpse, its fangs still biting into his armor, and ran.

As he ran he tried to tear off the dog Kyoma's body; however his hands were devoid of energy.

"Shit!"

Adlet and the others saw him as the enemy. If they caught up with him they would come and kill him immediately. And he could no longer expect backup like he'd received in the previous battles.

At the moment Goldof didn't even have the power to fight off the Heroes anymore.

*I'll probably be killed when I get near the Blade Gem's range. I won't even be able to get close to finding Nashetania.*

"Run!"

"Follow him! We can kill him now!"

Goldof could not hope for Dozzu to help him. He could no longer hear Nashetania's voice, and he didn't have any clues to save her.

Goldof ran from the Kyoma. He cut down one of those that had caught up with him, and then ran again. Once more another Kyoma caught up to him and again he cut it down and ran. Again and again the cycle of slice-and-run repeated itself.

Perhaps dozens of minutes had passed. Yet he could only think of a single solution to his predicament. Abandoning Nashetania.

Tgurneu had said that if Goldof told Adlet and the others the truth then at that instant they would kill Nashetania. Even though if Nashetania died Chamo would be saved.

After taking down the Kyoma around him, he figured it was best to return to where Adlet was. Then he would tell Adlet the truth and he could beg for his forgiveness. However, even Adlet would probably kill Goldof without waiting to hear what he had to say.

They would fight together against Tgurneu, annihilate the Majin, and then he would go off somewhere. And he hoped that he could forget all the days he had spent with Nashetania; it being nothing more than a dream.

He was just about finished.

Goldof took down a leopard Kyoma, the last of which had surrounded him. Then he headed south and found the direction towards which Adlet and the others were headed.

"...Princess."

Various emotions welled up within Goldof's chest. The shock he felt when he had first encountered Nashetania. The excitement and thrill he felt when he headed to save her with the iron hammer in his hands. And the emotion he felt when Nashetania listened to his request.

The confusion he'd felt when he found out Nashetania was an unbelievable tomboy. The anger he felt when she would play tricks on him. And the love he felt when over the days she became more and more of a woman.

The bewilderment he'd felt when it was suddenly announced that she would become a Saint. The worry he felt when she subjected herself to harsh training without considering her own life. The joy he felt watching over her develop into the Saint of Blades. The regret he felt when he took it easy on her at the tournament before the Goddess and ended up conceding victory to her.

The uneasiness he felt when he found out that he had been selected as one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers. The fighting spirit he had when he determined to return her from the Wailing Demon Territory safely. The slight jealousy he felt towards Adlet.

And the fact that Nashetania existed and how that fact alone filled his chest with a sense of relief.

"If it were just a dream I would be able to forget it."

A tear ran down Goldof's face.

"How great would that have been?"

The leopard Kyoma's corpse lay at his feet. He picked it up and bit into its neck. Goldof loudly slurped the remaining blood from the Kyoma's body. Perhaps it was the first time a human had tasted a Kyoma.

The Kyoma's blood soothed the burns in his mouth. Then he removed his armor and applied the rest of his medicine to his body. After that he downed the medicine he'd received from the Piena Royal Family in one gulp.

The medicine was strong, close to a poison. It made intense pain rush through his throat and his gut. But he withstood the urge to vomit and crouched down.

"..."

Then Goldof stood back to his feet and balled his hands into fists. He swung his spear and moved his body around.

*I can still fight*, he thought as he quietly walked.

He had decided. No matter how many difficulties come his way he would absolutely save Nashetania.

#

About eighteen hours earlier, Nashetania and Dozzu were hiding in a corner of the Forest of Severed Fingers.

They had been talking with their faces drawn close to one another. In fact, they were so close that it was difficult to tell them apart.

None of their comrades were in the vicinity. They had fought with Cargikk's followers and those were now all dead.

Blood was dripping from Dozzu's entire body, and Nashetania was more injured than he was. She had been stabbed through the chest by a horn with the wound reaching her back. The tendons on one of her legs had been cut deep. Thanks to a Kyoma that had been fused with her body Nashetania possessed otherworldly healing abilities, but even with that the wound was too deep.

Dozzu wondered how many more hours they would be able to continue running. Cargikk's followers had surrounded Dozzu's forces again and again. And he was unsure whether the two of them would make it to morning.

"Nashetania. I will cut open a path for you. Please use it to escape."

"...Dozzu."

"If you die everything will be over. As long as you continue to live our hopes will persevere. So, please survive."

"No. I can't do anything by myself. If the two of us don't survive then our ambitions will fall apart."

Dozzu was about to say that there was nothing that could be done to prevent that now. However the next moment Nashetania said something that he couldn't believe.

"Let's ask Tgurneu for help."

"...Are you insane?"

"No. It's the only option we have. We can use the Blade Gem we inserted in Chamo-san's stomach to negotiate. We will have Tgurneu kill Cargikk's followers for us. And in exchange we will kill Chamo-san."

Nashetania looked to the west of the forest. From the Kyoma's movements they surmised that was Tgurneu's location.

"I think that Tgurneu will respond to our proposal. He most likely doesn't know how to handle Chamo-san. So until we kill her, he will protect us."

That was a possibility, but Dozzu could not agree to the idea. Tgurneu was more terrifying than any other person Dozzu knew. There was no way that he would help them.

"If we can get out of this situation then a path will be opened up for us. It doesn't matter how we do it, we have to survive. And there is no other way we can."

Dozzu knew that, but he still couldn't consent.

"Nashetania. After Chamo-san is killed, we will no longer be of any use to Tgurneu. It doesn't seem likely that he will let us live."

"We will only join forces temporarily. After we get away from Cargikk's forces we will escape. And we should be able to get away before we kill Chamo-san."

"You're viewing Tgurneu as soft. It's unlikely that he will let us escape," Dozzu said.

"If I am captured by Tgurneu then the Helmet of Truth with Goldof will activate. And if that happens then Goldof will come and save me."

"...But he..."



"The Helmet of Truth will only activate if I am captured by someone. So at the moment it can't call to Goldof. But if I am captured by Tgurneu then that is another story. The Helmet will convey to him the danger I'm in."

"Will Goldof-san really come and save you?"

"I believe he will come."

Dozzu closed his eyes and thought about Goldof. Dozzu had watched over Goldof when he was pretending to be a pet.

He knew well that his loyalty was absolute. And in Dozzu's considerably long lifetime he had never seen the likes of the young boy's loyalty. It actually made him feel sorry for the young boy.

That loyalty was the reason why he hadn't been able to bring Goldof to their side. He did not live in order to fulfill his own ambitions. He probably just fought to protect Nashetania. And since Dozzu and his followers' ambitions exposed Nashetania to danger over and over again Goldof might try to obstruct their goals in order to save Nashetania.

"You betrayed Goldof-san. No matter what you may think, it would be naïve to not doubt his loyalty."

"You don't understand him, Dozzu. That kid cannot live without me."

"...Nashetania."

"Since the first time I met him, Goldof has been that way. And even now that won't change."

Dozzu could hear rustling sounds behind him. Cargikk's followers were already approaching.

"Goldof will come. He will definitely come to help me. Please Dozzu. Trust me."

"I wonder if he can do it. Can he save you after you're captured by Tgurneu?"

"He can do it," Nashetania replied, and then she smiled.

"Chamo-san is not the strongest person in the world. Ignoring the likes of a giant fool like Adlet-san, I believe that the World's Strongest is Goldof when he tries to protect me."

Dozzu closed his eyes and nodded.

### Chapter Six: Part Two

Although Dozzu was far at the outskirts of the Lava Belt, he was able to hear Goldof's war cry since his hearing far surpassed human capabilities. From listening to his roar Dozzu could tell that Goldof had still not given up on saving Nashetania.

The entire situation was proceeding as Nashetania had predicted.

Tgurneu readily agreed to their proposal and killed all of Cargikk's followers. Then he restrained Nashetania and forced Dozzu to obey him. So it was clear that Tgurneu did not intend to let Nashetania live. And Dozzu knew that when she had served her purpose he planned to kill her at once as well.

Still, everything was exactly as Nashetania had anticipated.

She had anticipated that the Heroes of the Six Flowers would be lured to the Lava Belt and fallen into a trap. And she had expected Goldof to come to the Lava Belt in order to help her.

But the problem was after these.

If Chamo were to die as things were now then Nashetania would be killed. And there was probably an hour and a half left until that time. It wasn't possible for

Nashetania to escape with her own power, and Dozzu couldn't help her. The only way for her to survive was for Goldof to rescue her.

And if Adlet found Nashetania first then she would without a doubt be killed. It was extremely unlikely that he would allow Nashetania to keep on living.

*I wonder if Goldof can save Nashetania.*

Dozzu knew how Tgurneu had hidden Nashetania. However if he told Goldof then Tgurneu would have Nashetania killed at once. Not to mention the fact that Tgurneu raised Dark Kyoma with frightening abilities. It didn't seem like Goldof would be able to fathom those abilities. So the possibility that Nashetania would be saved might as well have been zero.

Nevertheless, the only choice Dozzu had was to trust Goldof. The only thing he could do was hope that he could save Nashetania.

Whether Tgurneu's plan or Nashetania's was carried out, everything depended on Goldof.

#

Goldof came back to the edge of the Blade Gem's range. He laid down under the shade of a rocky hill then peeked his head out to survey the area. There were several plumes of dirt spiraling into the air across the Lava Belt, and not only could Goldof hear explosions in the distance but he could also see the ground crumbling afterwards. However he didn't know exactly what was happening.

Goldof looked over to the direction where the explosions were going off. Rolonia and Fremy were in the dirt clouds and it looked like they were searching for something underground.

*Perhaps they are searching for Nashetania, Goldof thought. But they don't realize that the Nashetania they've been chasing is an impostor, right? To them it would only have seemed that Nashetania had suddenly just disappeared. So maybe they are thinking Nashetania is hiding underground.*

"...Where did you hide the Princess?" Goldof muttered from his hiding place in the shade of the rocky hill.

Mora had announced earlier with her mountain echoes that Nashetania was within a kilometer of Chamo's location. That information seemed credible. Plus Nashetania told him that she was inside a Kyoma. So if both of those were true then that Kyoma was somewhere within a one kilometer radius. And as long as a special ability was not being used to hide it there was no reason that he couldn't find it.

#

*What was that ability?*

Goldof's thinking had reached its limits. *What kind of ability was hiding her?* He simply had no clue. Goldof did not have the knowledge of Adlet or Fremy concerning the Kyoma, and he did not know where the Kyoma that hid Nashetania was.

He was at a standstill.

"I can't give up," he told himself. But although the words cheered him up, they could not make up for his lack of knowledge. As he heard Fremy blowing up the ground, Goldof continued to think silently.

#

"Well, that's shallow thinking, don't you think, Fremy?"

At the same time Tgurneu was flying about in the distance. At the moment his body was just the head of a crow. After escaping from Fremy and the others' attacks, Tgurneu had taken to the skies to overlook the Lava Belt. And thanks to the bird Kyoma's vision, he could clearly see what Adlet and the others were doing.

Blowing up the ground and then searching under the earth. Tgurneu laughed scornfully at the idea. There was no way he would conceal Nashetania so easily.

Even Adlet was again searching in the wrong place. He was deceived by Tgurneu and now believed in the existence of some imaginary Saint Instrument.

And so Tgurneu believed he had won the contest. It would probably still take more time until Adlet and the others realize that they were mistaken. But by then it would already be too late.

"...Mu."

He found Goldof at the edge of the Blade Gem's range. He was lying on the ground and searching for something. It actually shocked Tgurneu that he still hadn't given up.

Goldof's existence had been really favorable for Tgurneu. He had lured the Six Flowers to the Lava Belt, and through his foolish actions Adlet and the others were confused and had lost sight of the truth. Even now he was trying to save Nashetania alone without telling any of the valuable information he'd discovered to Adlet and the others.

It didn't seem likely that Goldof could save Nashetania. He would just be killed by Adlet and the others before long. Tgurneu also made sure to order his pawns in advance to kill Goldof, but perhaps there was no need for their help.

Remaining calm, Tgurneu looked over the Lava Belt. He was waiting for the look on Goldof's face at the exact moment when all of his hopes fell apart.

#

Goldof continued to think as he hid among the rocky hills. He knew of one Kyoma ability that could conceal things. Nashetania had used it earlier to hide herself. However according to Fremy even that power would only last ten seconds at most. There was no way she could continue to conceal herself for several hours.

*Or is Fremy truly the seventh and there really is a Kyoma that could make someone disappear for a long time?*

Goldof shook his head. Adlet said it was impossible for the effect of the hypnosis to last for several hours. If Fremy were the seventh then that meant Adlet was genuine. Since both of them made the same claim it was hard to consider their words a lie.

So there had to be some other way.

Goldof wondered if there was a Kyoma with the ability to shrink Nashetania's body after swallowing her. If that were the case then no matter how hard they looked Adlet and the others would never find her.

*I wonder if there is someone with the ability to expand the effective range of the Blade Gem. If there is then Nashetania could be in a place even farther than we think.*



Various ideas crowded Goldof's mind. But without any clues there was no way he could organize his thoughts into a cohesive theory. Eventually Goldof realized that his delusions were only complicating things meaninglessly.

*I have no clues. And I have no way of finding any.*

Goldof once again looked at Fremy and Rolonia who were still blowing up the ground. *Perhaps Nashetania really is being hidden in the ground, just like they thought.*

*There must be a Kyoma that can dig underground and move at the same time. That kind of ability seems possible, especially since it would be similar to the abilities that even Chamo's Jyuma possessed.*

*And if that's true then one way to find Nashetania is to wait for Fremy and Rolonia to find Nashetania.* The instant they found her he would launch his attack and keep Nashetania safe. Other than that, Goldof couldn't come up with any other good ideas.

*But is that really okay?* he wondered. *I wonder if the Kyoma that ate Nashetania is really underground.*

"..."

That wasn't right. Goldof was certain. If that Kyoma were hiding underground then Tgurneu would have tried to stop Fremy. He should want to avoid Nashetania being found at all costs.

*Nashetania is not underground. Or at the very least she can't be found by Fremy's methods. Nashetania is being hidden with some other ability.*

*And I have to figure out how,* Goldof realized and then continued to think.

#

There was a Kyoma in the Lava Belt looking up to the sky and staring at the sun in thought.

*There is probably about one hour left until Chamo Rosso dies. And no matter what efforts are made to extend that time, it won't be longer than an hour and a half. If I can continue to hide her until that time then my duty will be over. I would have been able to assist with killing the strongest of the Six Flowers.*

He was looking forward to experiencing that feeling. The death of one of the Flowers would be the greatest joy for the Kyoma.

The Kyoma was a giant lizard with rock skin. For about two hours he had continued to stand quiet and still about 800 meters from Chamo's location. Nashetania was inside his stomach and his tongue was wrapped about her throat, restricting her movements.

If she tried to say anything he would immediately be able to squeeze and smash her throat as instructed by Tgurneu. But at the moment it seemed that Nashetania was unconscious.

He didn't have a name, but if he had to say one he would probably call himself the Dark Specialist Number 26. He was one of the Kyoma that Tgurneu had raised to have unique abilities.

About a hundred years ago, Tgurneu ordered him to perfect his ability to hide bodies. So over the next hundred years he remade his body and as a result it became brittle and his fighting ability decreased dramatically. However, his ability to conceal bodies was honed to peerless levels.

About four and a half hours ago, he had placed Nashetania in his stomach. And when Nashetania had asked Goldof to help her, he smashed her throat so that she wouldn't be able to speak.

Then about two hours ago the Heroes of the Six Flowers came to the Lava Belt. The lizard Kyoma followed the fake Nashetania Tgurneu created and fought the Six Flowers. He predicted when Chamo would come and attack them and then signaled Nashetania inside his body to activate the Blade Gem.

If Nashetania didn't obey the command she would have been killed immediately.

After the Blade Gem was activated the lizard Kyoma ran from the Six Flowers. Then he finally reached his current location and after confirming that he couldn't see any enemies in the area, he activated his ability and hid his body.

He had been standing there ever since.

Three Heroes had passed in front of his eyes and he had even seen Goldof. In fact, Goldof had come within meters of the lizard's position. However none of them realized he was there. There was absolutely no way for humans or Kyoma to find him if they did not know about his ability.

About thirty minutes ago one of Tgurneu's messengers sent him a new command. Prevent Goldof from saving Nashetania no matter what. And in the case that he couldn't stop him, then he was permitted to kill Nashetania.

However the lizard Kyoma was not worried at all. No one was able to find him.

#

Goldof thought about going to another location. He had to find some clues.

He started to move discreetly so that Fremy and the others wouldn't notice him. However, when he finally stood to his feet he sensed something coming for him and dropped back to the ground. A bullet flew right above his head.

"So he was there after all!" Goldof heard Rolonia shout.

With his cover blown Goldof got back up and ran as fast as he could.

This fight was different than before. Fremy and Rolonia's attacks were relentless, each one with the intent of ending his life. Even if he stood and fought, he had no hopes of winning in his current condition.

Fremy aimed accurately for the openings in his armor, and if he ran straight her bullets would have made contact with his skin. So Goldof dashed from side to side and used the difficult terrain as cover.

"You can catch him, Rolonia!"

"Right!"

He heard the two shouting behind him. Then he heard Rolonia's footsteps drawing nearer. In response Goldof urged his injured body to continue running.

Fremy threw a bomb his way and the explosion hit his back, breaking Goldof's balance. Meanwhile Rolonia advanced within striking distance of her whip and screamed so loud that it echoed throughout the forest.

"You're gonna die! You traitor, I won't, I won't, I won't let you kill Chamo-san! Show me your insides!"

His armor couldn't stop all the attacks so he had to resort to fending off her whip with his spear. With just instinct he swung his spear back and forth, blocking each of Rolonia's strikes as they came at him from all directions.

However, defending against Rolonia's whip kept him rooted to the spot. There wasn't a single opening where he could approach with an attack of his own. And at the same time Fremy was pulling up close to him. If he were hit with one of her bombs or bullets that would be the end.

Goldof had to make a move. After blocking her whip with her spear, Goldof charged directly at Rolonia and kicked her in the chest. With his strong legs the force of the kick sent her flying back over ten meters, even with her armor on.

"Rolonia!"

Fremy shot at Goldof's face, but the bullets were stopped by his helmet. It jolted his head immensely, and he felt his consciousness start to fade. Goldof turned his back on the both of them and once again resumed his escape.

Rolonia's whip was thirty meters long. He had to avoid that range at all costs.

"If you don't release Chamo-san, I'll kill you, Goldof. I'll kill, I'll kill, I'll kill, I'll kill you!"

As he heard Rolonia's shouts Goldof thought, *You don't know how happy I'd be if I could do that. But Tgurneu has captured Nashetania and is forcing her to Chamo. If she refuses then she'll be killed.*

Goldof continued to run. *I wonder if I can tell anyone about the truth I heard from Tgurneu. After all there's no way I can find Nashetania on my own.*

Tgurneu said that if he told the Heroes then the Seventh would inform him. So Goldof wondered if he could secretly speak with someone he trusted without the seventh finding out.

"...Kuu..."

As he ran, Goldof turned to look behind him. He couldn't tell Rolonia or Fremy the truth since he wasn't sure they weren't the seventh. The ones that had a high probability of being genuine were Mora and Chamo. However Hans was right next to them. And Goldof couldn't say for certain that he was genuine either.

*So what about Adlet?* Goldof thought.

"Run faster, Rolonia!"

"You filthy brute, how dare you run from us. I'm gonna rip all the blood out of you!"

Adlet was no good. Goldof also couldn't say definitively that Adlet was genuine. In fact, he had no confidence that Adlet wasn't the seventh.

The Heroes trusted Adlet all because Nashetania had tried to kill him. However, Goldof knew that the seventh and Nashetania were not allies. And if that were the case then there was still a possibility that Adlet was indeed an impostor.

In short, he couldn't tell the truth to anyone. The reality of his situation was that Goldof had no choice but to fight alone and unassisted.

"Rolonia! Don't chase him farther than that!" Fremy shouted after several minutes.

Rolonia came to a stop and Goldof kept on running.

"Adlet is all alone! Tgurneu or Nashetania might go after him!"

"Ri, right! Let's go back."

*That helped*, Goldof thought as he leaned his back against a boulder and took ragged breaths. Even though he had to find a way to save Nashetania he wasn't even close to finding any clues.



Looking up to the sky he suddenly thought about Adlet. He too had experienced fighting alone without any assistance within the Illusion Fog Barrier. And yet after that he was able to unravel all the mysteries and win.

*But I can't fight like Adlet. He has wit and intelligence. And he has the power to win the trust of others.* Goldof didn't have any of that. And now that he had been placed in the same situation he finally understood for the first time just how incredible Adlet truly was.

*I can't compare to Adlet. But there's no way I can give in,* Goldof thought, even though his mind was still just going around in circles.

#

Meanwhile Nashetania was inside a Kyoma's belly waiting for Goldof to come save her.

The place where her left arm had been torn off hurt. It was hard to breathe and she couldn't move her head. It seemed like she would pass out at any moment. However, she bit her lip and stayed awake.

Nashetania was joined with a Kyoma that granted her a healing power she desperately used trying to fix her smashed throat.

She had to tell Goldof her location. But with the current condition of her throat she could barely produce a sound.

"...Princess, are you well? Where are you?"

Sometimes she would hear Goldof's voice within her head. He was still searching for her. He was still trying to save her. And if that were the case then she wouldn't lose hope.

The only things that Nashetania knew were that she was in a Kyoma which was within the range of the Blade Gem and that it was standing completely still. But she had no idea how the Kyoma was concealing its body.

Within the darkness Nashetania heard numerous sounds. She heard the sound of the Kyoma's footsteps as they all ran at once. She heard the sound of Adlet or Fremy fighting with the Kyoma. And she heard countless explosions going off around her.

From those sounds she could guess that she was above ground. And she supposed that Adlet or Fremy had passed by her a number of times. However it was still a mystery why no one had been able to discover the Kyoma that she was inside of.

"..."

Nashetania was not moving. She pretended to be unconscious in order to make the Kyoma she was inside of drop its guard. However, she strained her ears, trying to pick up any noise that could help her grasp the situation outside and pinpoint her location. And then she would tell Goldof.

As she listened, Nashetania wondered what she could say to compel Goldof to come and help her. What could she say that would help him find her.

Then she recalled what Goldof had said six years ago. He said that he wanted to save her again, but she still wasn't able to grant his wish.

#

Hiding outside the range of the Blade Gem, Goldof continued to think.

He recalled everything that happened after hearing Nashetania ask to be saved. Nashetania's words, Dozzu's words, Tgurneu's words, Adlet and Mora's words, he wondered if there was a clue within each of them.

But nothing came to mind. Mora only conveyed Chamo's situation. Adlet said that he hadn't found any other clues. Tgurneu had chosen his words carefully so that Goldof wouldn't be able to find Nashetania. And Dozzu was being watched by Tgurneu so he couldn't say anything.

One more time Goldof thought about everything from the beginning. He thought about all the things that he'd seen and heard in the battles up until that point. Each one he scrutinized carefully.

Nashetania told him that she was at the south of the forest within a Kyoma in the Lava Belt. And she told him to follow what she said and come to her.

But Goldof had questions, with the most fundamental of those being a question he could not answer.

*Why the Lava Belt? If they wanted to lure the Six Flowers and activate the Blade Gem then anywhere in the forest should have been okay. Tgurneu distinctly chose the Lava Belt as the battleground.*

*There has to be a reason, a reason why everything had to happen here.*

Suddenly something came to Goldof. He stood up on the rocky hill and stared up at the empty sky in thought. But being so preoccupied with his questions and thoughts Goldof had stopped paying attention to the area around him.

Adlet was walking about 200 meters away from him and Goldof had entered right into his line of sight. Panic rushed through Goldof, but he managed to slowly lower himself to the ground and hide himself from Adlet.

For a while he remained silent. *If he noticed me then he will probably call to Fremy or Rolonia. And if that happens then they will surround and kill me.* Goldof wondered if he should head out and take Adlet down before he could call to his allies. But that too was impossible.

*Please don't notice me,* Goldof wished as he waited for Adlet to pass.

After some time, Goldof slowly stuck out his head, and Adlet had moved far away. Goldof then immediately lowered his head back to the ground and covertly distanced himself from the area.

Adlet seemed to be searching for something and his eyes seemed to be giving off a strange light. But he didn't look like he was wandering about without an objective. *Perhaps he has found some kind of clue.*

*What are you searching for? What have found out?*

"There is no time," Goldof muttered and then continued to think.

#

Nashetania strained her ears as she waited within the Kyoma's belly. She could hear explosions going off non-stop all around her. *Perhaps that's Fremy's power,* she speculated, though since she couldn't see she had no way of knowing for sure.

But she was certain that the others were looking for her, and that it was not just Goldof. If they found her first then they would probably kill her. Nevertheless, Nashetania forced down her fear and continued to concentrate on the sounds outside.

"...It's no use, Fremy-san. There isn't anything here."

"It looks that way."

The voices were quite close. It was Fremy's voice. She didn't recognize the other voice but it was most likely Rolonia.

"Isn't she underground? So... where in the world..."

"Do you think she is hiding even further below? There might be a Kyoma that has that kind of ability," Rolonia replied.

"Even if that were true, there would definitely be some traces left over. It seems unlikely that we wouldn't be able to find anything after overturning the entire area."

The two of them did not notice the Kyoma that had ingested Nashetania. The Kyoma was completely still, probably desperately trying to keep its presence a secret. Perhaps it was unsure of its ability to remain hidden.

"There are still places we haven't checked yet. The basin where Chamo is located....the rocky hills surrounding them. Let's go and search those places."

"What if it's not there?"

The two's voices were getting farther away and soon Nashetania could no longer make out what they were saying. She wondered where they went.

At the moment Nashetania didn't have any means of pinpointing her location. She couldn't receive any information that she could convey to Goldof.

But she had to try. So Nashetania strained her ears and continued to listen for a clue.

#

"There must be something."

Goldof managed to evade Adlet and was now staring silently at the area Fremy had blown up. Although he was sure Adlet, Fremy, and Rolonia weren't around, he still couldn't enter the Blade Gem's range.

He decided that he would only enter after he had found an answer.

*Why the Lava Belt?* Even though he had no proof to back up his speculations, Goldof was confident that if he could just unravel the mystery surrounding the question then he would finally be able to reach Nashetania.

*It couldn't be anywhere else, it had to be the Lava Belt.* The area was hot and the heat continuously rose from the ground and through one's feet. He wondered if that heat could be used to hide someone. Goldof pondered the possibility for a moment but couldn't come to a conclusion

He picked up one of the rocks at his feet. *Did the stone have some kind of secret?* he wondered, but even if he stared at it until it made a hole, it wouldn't lead to an answer.

Nothing came to mind. He couldn't think of any reason as to why the Lava Belt was chosen. But there had to be something. The one thing he was sure of was that there was some kind of secret within the Lava Belt.

As he pondered, he could hear the sound of lightning strikes in the distance. They were coming from the direction of Chamo's basin.

"...Is that Dozzu?"

Goldof recalled that Tgurneu had ordered Dozzu to stop Hans. Probably Dozzu's true feelings were to save Nashetania as well. However he was unable to go against Tgurneu so Goldof couldn't expect Dozzu to help him.



"..."

Goldof once again went over everything that had happened since the beginning of the battles with Nashetania. He thought back to all the words Nashetania and Dozzu had said.

*Tgurneu is watching Dozzu and forcing him to obey him. Maybe he can't do anything to save Nashetania.*

*No, that isn't right.* If Goldof were in Dozzu's position he would have definitely taken measures so that Nashetania could be saved. And if he didn't then he would have given clues that Tgurneu wouldn't notice.

Goldof thought back to each of Dozzu's actions. After some time his mind stopped on the only one that could be called unnatural. It had been in the middle of the fight between the fake Nashetania and the Six Flowers, right before the Blade Gem inside Chamo's stomach had been activated.

*"Goldof-san, how many times have you fought with Nashetania?"*

At the time Goldof had been confused by the sudden question. But thinking about it for a second time it did seem that for some reason Dozzu looked anxious. After that he asked about how many times Nashetania had gotten away from him.

*Why did Dozzu ask those questions? Nashetania was captured so my experience fighting with her should not have been a serious concern. And what in the world does her running away from me have to do with anything?*

Dozzu was trying to confirm something.

*Was there anything else that was odd?* Goldof didn't just reconsider his words, he even thought about the slight changes in Dozzu's expression and even when the small Kyoma shifted his gaze.

After a bit Goldof remembered a time when Dozzu's expression had changed right before he was going to fight with Adlet in order to help the fake Nashetania.

*"Dozzu. The concealing ability that the Princess uses. It can be broken by squinting one's eyes or harming one's self, right?"*

Goldof remembered that Dozzu's expression changed when he'd asked that. The small Kyoma stared up at Goldof's face quietly, as if he were thinking about something.

Then he replied, *"That's right. You know a lot about it. That's good. Then I can save the time it would take to explain it."*

"...It couldn't be."

*Had Dozzu been trying to confirm earlier whether or not I knew about the concealing ability?*

When Dozzu heard that Goldof understood how to break the ability, the small Kyoma seemed relieved. On the surface Dozzu seemed to have responded in a brusque manner, but it was clear that Dozzu had been pleased.

*The concealing ability. Could that be how the Kyoma was hiding its body?*

Just as he hit upon the theory another idea popped into his head. Fremy said that when the concealing ability was used a sweet smell was emitted in the area. And that was why Tgurneu chose the Lava Belt as their battle ground.

The smell of sulfur filled the Lava Belt and if someone were in the Lava Belt for several minutes their sense of smell would grow numb. Tgurneu chose the Lava Belt so that when the concealing ability was used the smell of sulfur would obscure it.

"...I've got you," Goldof muttered. Within the darkness he could finally see a faint light. He now understood the enemy's ability.

### Chapter Six: Part Three

Keeping concealed, Goldof ran as fast as he could around the perimeter of the Blade Gem's range. There was still the danger of being discovered by Adlet or Fremy. But he was no longer in a situation where he could think freely about that.

Fremy's bombs were ripping apart the terrain of the Lava Belt. Even from the outskirts of the Blade Gem range he could see the changes in the terrain.

Goldof found Adlet 500 meters away. He was sitting with his head hung and thinking about something. It was unlikely that he would spot Goldof, but it was still probably dangerous to approach him. Goldof stopped moving towards him and started going in a different direction.

Goldof was certain that there was a Kyoma using a concealing ability somewhere in the Blade Gem's range. And Nashetania was within its stomach.

Allegedly the concealing ability was a kind of hypnosis.

According to Fremy, the Kyoma scattered a unique narcotic around the area while emitting a sound that could not be heard by humans.

And Goldof knew how to break through it. If he inflicted a sharp pain onto his body then the effects of the hypnosis would weaken. And if he forced his mind to focus and squinted hard then he would be able to see who was hidden.

In the past the concealment could not last longer than ten seconds, so Goldof did not know how the Kyoma was hiding itself now. But if it were using the same kind of ability then the way to break through it would be the same.

"Uguu!"

As he ran, Goldof grabbed one of his fingernails. He then gathered his strength and broke the nail off his finger. *That should weaken the hypnosis*, Goldof thought as he withstood the pain and strained his eyes.

However there was nothing in the vast Lava Belt that became visible to him.

*Is it somewhere else?* Goldof wondered as he moved and ripped off the rest of his broken nail. He then squinted again and still couldn't find anything.

"...Shit!"

He could no longer hear the sound of the bombs that Fremy had been throwing. Perhaps she had given up on searching beneath the ground and was now searching for another clue.

He had to find Nashetania before Adlet and the others. But he had already looked about the entire area of the Blade Gem's range, and even though he had broken all the nails on both of his hands he still hadn't been able to find anything.

*Perhaps my theory was incorrect.*

*Maybe pain wasn't enough to see through the concealment ability. Or there is still something else that I need to find Nashetania.*

There were less than 30 minutes left. Panic was clouding his thoughts and irritation was chipping away at his concentration.

#

Able to see the Lava Belt much better than before, Dark Kyoma 26 continued to watch the Six Flowers. And all the while Nashetania was still within his stomach.

Adlet, Fremy, and Rolonia were having a conversation about 20 meters away from his location. However the Kyoma was certain they weren't aware of him.

Hans and Mora didn't seem like they were going to leave the basin. So they too weren't a problem.

The only problem was Goldof. He may have realized that Number 26 was using a concealing ability.

*"Your concealment ability is weak," Tgurneu had told him 200 years ago.*

At that time he could only hide himself for several seconds. But the drain on his strength was intense and so after using it once he would be unable to conceal himself again for a while. On top of that his ability to conceal was incomplete and if the way to see through his technique was discovered then he would be unable to use the ability anymore.

At best, taking the Six Flowers by surprise was probably the only way the concealment could be used. But the warriors that would be chosen as Heroes of the Six Flowers would most likely not be beaten by a surprise attack.

However, Tgurneu had said that the concealment ability had a different possibility. It could hide a body. And as minor as that sounded, depending on how it was used that simple ability could lead to the annihilation of all of the Heroes. And so the Kyoma became one of Tgurneu's specialist Kyoma, called the Dark Kyoma. He was given the number 26.

But 26 could only extend the effectiveness of his concealment for several seconds. No matter how much his abilities progressed he couldn't change that.

*And so he thought, If I can't extend the effectiveness longer than 10 seconds then maybe it would be good if I repeated the technique back to back. That way I could do it tens, hundreds, or even thousands of times.*

But no matter how much his ability progressed he wasn't able to change the fact that if he used the ability once he would not be able to use it again for several seconds.

Then he got the idea of separating himself into thousands or tens of thousands of pieces. And that is what he did. He changed his body so that his new form grew ovaries. Then he separated his own core and acquired the ability to produce eggs.

The children born from the eggs were about one centimeter long and about a millimeter in diameter. They didn't have organs that could process food, nor could they drink water. Which meant that they would die after only a day.

But the children could use the concealment ability in the same way as their parent. From their bodies they dispersed a narcotic and emitted a specific sound wave which would put the humans in the area under hypnosis. As a result the hypnosis tricked the humans' perception and hid both the children and their parent's body from sight. Number 26 had strewn about 50,000 of his children across the three kilometer area of the Lava Belt.

Even if someone were able to break the hypnosis of one of his children, another would immediately place them back under. And if they could break free from that hypnosis then another child would act. By repeating that again and again Number 26's body remained hidden.

Fremy's bombs had killed a large amount of his children. And even Number 26 had been injured by the explosions. Nevertheless there were still enough of his offspring to maintain the hypnosis.

Goldof had probably already realized that he was using a concealing ability. But the hypnosis placed on him was still quite strong.



And although Number 26 was injured they still would not be able to find him easily. And as long as they did not focus all of their attention on one point or strain their eyes, then they would not be able to break through his concealment ability.

Goldof was running around doing everything he could to find Number 26, but it was no use. There were only thirty minutes left. He would definitely be able to maintain the concealment for that time.

"...It's Goldof. He holds the key. I can't think of any other possibility."

Right beside the Kyoma Adlet and the others seemed to have finished their conversation. They were foolish. They were about to go search for a clue even though what they were looking for was right next to them.

Adlet and the others then began to run. And at that very moment there were suddenly two explosions. Hot water erupted out from the ground. Most likely Fremy's explosions from earlier had disrupted the magma currents underground.

It was surprising, but it doesn't seem like anything major, Number 26 thought.

#

Nashetania had been waiting within the Kyoma's body for the chance when she could tell Goldof her location or rather what she knew about her location.

She pretended to be unconscious and patiently waited to hear something that could help.

Her throat was already healing to an extent and perhaps it had sufficiently healed for her to be able to talk. However if the Kyoma even heard her say one word it would probably strangle her.

She could only say a few words to Goldof.

"...It's Goldof. He holds the key. I can't think of any other possibility."

Nashetania could hear Adlet and the others talking. They were right next to her. She thought about telling Goldof about them, but it wasn't enough.

*Isn't there anything Goldof could use to pinpoint my location?* Nashetania wondered right before she heard two explosions.

It took Nashetania a while to figure out that the explosions were just hot water shooting up from the ground. But when she did, Nashetania decided that that was the only time she could contact Goldof.

"Goldof, two geysers just erupted right next to me."

The moment she was done whispering, the tentacles around her throat squeezed tight and Nashetania passed out.

#

Goldof was still searching for the concealing Kyoma when he heard Nashetania.

"Goldof, just now two geysers erupted right near me." Her voice was so hoarse that it was hard to believe it belonged to Nashetania.

But it was definitely her and upon hearing it Goldof immediately began to run.

Fortunately Adlet and the others were not in the Blade Gem's range. It seemed like they were searching for something outside of the perimeter. Even so, Goldof figured he would probably be discovered within ten minutes. So before that he had to find Nashetania and save her.

Goldof ran. Eventually he found one geyser. But there was no steam rising up from it nearby. So Goldof continued on and found another geyser. But that wasn't the right one either.

All of the pain in his fingers and all over his body disappeared from his mind. He just ran and ran, thinking only about Nashetania.

#

Dark Kyoma Number 26 felt like his blood had grown cold. He had thought Nashetania was unconscious, but not only had that been a lie, but she had also been able to tell Goldof their location.

Goldof would come looking for her right away. So the Kyoma desperately began moving. However he moved slower than a walking human. The Kyoma had exhausted all of its energy on the concealing ability. Plus he had been injured by Fremy's explosions.

Tgurneu had said that Goldof was the only one the Kyoma absolutely could not let find Nashetania. He ordered Number 26 to kill Nashetania if it seemed like that was about to happen.

*Goldof will be here soon. What should I do?* Although he was panicked, there really was no choice. Number 26 had to obey Tgurneu's orders. For a Kyoma, not following their master's orders was a pain worse than death.

#

"...What's that? Did something happen?" Tgurneu muttered far off in the distance.

He had been watching over the Lava Belt as he flew through the sky. Goldof suddenly dashed into the range of the Blade Gem. And Number 26 sluggishly began to move.

*There's no way. Was their location figured out?* From a distance Tgurneu couldn't see what was going on.

"Hmm. I wonder what happened. Should I still trust Number 26?"

Tgurneu understood that Number 26 had fallen into danger. However, the idea of helping him never crossed his mind. If Tgurneu approached carelessly then his body might be placed in danger. He had allowed himself to fall into danger once before. He would not let that happen again.

"Alright, Number 26. I'm going to root for you from here. Good luck, fight hard, don't give up!" Tgurneu said happily as he continued to remain on the sidelines.

#

"Is that it?"

Goldof found two holes lined up with steam shooting out. It had already been five minutes since he'd heard from Nashetania.

Goldof bit on one of his broken fingers, grating the bones together. As an intense pain rushed through his finger Goldof strained his eyes.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw something move. He then concentrated all of his attention onto that point and again bit hard on one of his fingers. Whatever it was shook and slowly began to take form before eventually Goldof was looking at a single Kyoma. It had its back turned towards him and was trying to escape.

Goldof broke into a dash, but at that very moment a voice called out to him.

"Stop, Goldof."

He heard the voice at the same time as the Kyoma's body became clearly visible. It was a lizard Kyoma with stone skin. And when it turned around, Goldof stopped without thinking.

"...You bastard."

The Kyoma opened its small mouth and inside Goldof could see Nashetania with a sharp fang pressed to her face. Goldof recognized the threat instantly. If he were to advance even just a step the Kyoma was going to kill Nashetania.

There were about 30 meters between himself and the Kyoma. But Goldof simply had no way of closing that distance faster than the Kyoma could crush Nashetania's head.

Goldof understood, although it wasn't entirely clear. Tgurneu must have wanted to prevent Nashetania from being rescued at all costs.

He must have thought that it was better to kill her than to have her be saved. Even if it meant that Chamo would be spared.

"...Don't move another step."

Although the Kyoma's mouth was stuffed, it still spoke skillfully. Goldof could see that the Kyoma was determined. It would not hand Nashetania over. It definitely would not let Nashetania be rescued.

"Just a bit more."

Even now The Helmet of Truth was indicating that its master was in danger. Goldof wondered just how much time was left until Chamo died. *She might die at any time now, and if she dies then Nashetania's life will be over.*

"...The Princess, I'm going to save her."

Goldof cautiously took a step forward. As he moved the Kyoma's fangs bit into Nashetania's head. Blood dripped down her forehead and to her cheeks. It even sounded like her skull had cracked.

"Princess....please, wake up," Goldof called to her. However her limp body didn't move an inch.

But even if Nashetania had woken up there probably wouldn't be anything she could do. Tgurneu said that the so-called Number 26 Kyoma had a power that prevented the Princess from using her blades.

*Just one step is not enough*, Goldof thought as he edged forward a bit more. But the Kyoma didn't miss his slight advance and bit deeper into Nashetania's head.

*I can't get close.*

*Can I create an opening?* Goldof wondered. However every single one of his moves was being watched so he couldn't do anything.

*Well if I can't move then maybe can I throw my spear?* Goldof wondered. But he had a feeling that the Kyoma was expecting that and he figured that the moment he moved his hand to his spear the Kyoma would bite into Nashetania as hard as it could. Plus Goldof was sure that if he couldn't kill the Kyoma with one strike then the next instant the Kyoma would crush Nashetania's head. The moment he tried to go for its head the Kyoma would kill Nashetania. And he was unsure if he'd be able to accurately hit the Kyoma's heart with one shot.

"...I will not hand her over, no matter what."

Sweat dripped down Goldof's chin and to the ground. The Kyoma and Goldof were completely still as they stared at one another.



Goldof desperately thought of a way to kill the Kyoma in one strike without giving it the time to crush Nashetania's head in its teeth. But the more he thought about it the more he got the feeling that there was no way that he could save Nashetania with his own strength and the weapons he had on hand.

Still, Goldof didn't have the luxury of being able to retreat and search for a way to save her. There was very little time left. And the Kyoma would probably hide the moment he left. Now was his only chance.

The Kyoma's eyes narrowed and Goldof could tell it was smiling at him. And then a sense of dread pierced his entire body. He hadn't taken his eyes from the Kyoma, but Goldof could sense that someone else was at his right. It was Fremy, thirty meters away with her rifle trained on him.

"Goldof. Adlet and Rolonia will be here shortly," Fremy said. She could not see the Kyoma in front of him. "Just in case you're unsure, I'll say it again, releasing Chamo is the only way to save your life. So what will you do?"

Goldof didn't reply, which he could tell made Fremy slightly irritated. But he wouldn't take his eyes away from the Kyoma.

*What idiocy are you talking about?* Goldof thought. *I want to save Chamo just like you do.*

Fremy didn't shoot. It wasn't that she was looking for some kind of trap; she was just waiting for Adlet and Rolonia. And soon enough the two of them arrived.

From the Kyoma's expression Goldof knew that it was just going to wait there for him to be killed by the others.

"So you came, Adlet," Goldof said.

"What are you seeing?" Adlet asked, but Goldof didn't answer. "What's there?"

*He doesn't know*, Goldof realized. Adlet hadn't discovered anything, and he wasn't even aware of the concealment Kyoma.

Nevertheless Goldof ventured to say, "The Princess, did you find her?"

"Ah, we will soon. You've been giving us a hard time, but...that's all over now."

"...Have you realized the truth?"

"Who are you asking? I am the strongest man in the world."

*That was a bluff*, Goldof understood immediately. Adlet was surprisingly bad at lying.

"Tell me, Goldof, what's the story behind that Saint Instrument helmet of yours?"

"...Saint instrument?"

*Why does he know about the Helmet of Truth? And why is he asking me about such a trivial thing in a place like this?* Goldof didn't know the answers to those questions, but it didn't matter anyway.

With everything that had happened it didn't seem likely that Goldof would be able to convince Adlet and the others. Even if Goldof tried to say something they would probably just kill him without any hesitation. Goldof could practically feel their desire to kill him emanating from their bodies.

He doubted he could beat them if the all three took him on at once. But perhaps he could hold them off for a minute.

*So I have to finish this in one minute.*

Goldof brought his mind into focus. He controlled his breathing as his blood seethed and filled his body with energy. *I can save Nashetania*, he believed.

"We're going to kill you. But before we do I want to know if Nashetania is being hidden by your Saint Instrument."

"There's no point in asking that. Neither for myself nor for any of you."

What they were saying was meaningless. *They really don't know anything, not a single thing.* He figured that Adlet at the very least would have been able to figure out something.

Goldof glared scornfully at Adlet and the others.

"You failed, Adlet."

"At what?"

"I thought you might have been able to realize what was going on."

Goldof readied his spear and the other followed suit with their own weapons. As they did, Goldof watched Adlet carefully, wary of all of the secret weapons Adlet carried on his waist.

Adlet started to approach and Rolonia started to murmur her curses.

But before the battle broke out Goldof spoke. He spoke to declare his determination and to shake the resolve of Adlet and the others.

"I will protect the Princess."

Goldof crouched down and prepared to charge towards them.

"And I will save Chamo."

Goldof saw a twinge of hesitation in Adlet's face and in that instant Goldof ran straight for him.

For just an instant they squared off against one another. But the victor was decided in mere seconds.

"Goldof, you filth. I'll scatter your vulgar insides and blood then squish you like the worthless insect you are."

Rolonia lashed out with her whip, coiling the weapon about in order to keep Goldof away from Adlet. Fremy aimed for Goldof's head. And Adlet took out the metallic chain attached to his wrist in the blink of an eye.

*The longer this goes on the worse it will be for me,* Goldof thought.

So Goldof used his best attack at the start. Goldof dashed, twisted his body and used centrifugal force to chuck his spear. Since the chain connecting the spear to his wrist had already been broken, the spear launched out of his grasp, spiraling through the air as it flew at Rolonia.

The three of them believed he was trying to kill them so they probably didn't think he would let go of his spear. And in their confusion the spear's hilt flew right into Rolonia's chest. Since she was wearing armor she probably wasn't seriously injured, but the impact caused her whip to go awry, leaving Adlet open for attack.

And Adlet was his real target.

Adlet looked a bit worried about Rolonia, but he immediately refocused on killing Goldof. But if Rolonia managed to distract him in any way that was good.

"Ha!"

Adlet leaped directly to the side and launched his metallic chain. It was the same weapon he'd used to restrain Tgurneu before. It moved faster than Goldof could react and wrapped about Goldof's right hand.

At the same time Fremy shot at his stomach through one of the cracks in his armor. She probably didn't aim at his head to ensure that she wouldn't miss. Regardless, Goldof couldn't block the shot so he let the bullet hit him. As long as it didn't hit bone and shot clean through his body then it wouldn't stop him.

Feeling the heat of the bullet hole in his stomach Goldof broke off into a sprint. But running alongside him, Adlet yanked on the chain with impeccable timing just as both of Goldof's feet were airborne. Goldof pitched forward in a stagger.

Goldof fell to the ground, holding his stomach where the bullet had shot through. Fremy reloaded her rifle and shot at his face. Goldof figured that if he placed his hands on the ground then he wouldn't be able to initiate his next attack, so instead he slammed his own forehead to the ground.

With his hands free Goldof ripped off the armor covering his right arm with his left hand. He then rolled across the ground with his face nuzzled to the earth. Fremy was aiming at his face so he used his shoulder armor to block the bullet, the impact throwing Goldof's body backwards into a tumble.

As he rolled to his feet Goldof pulled as hard as he could on Adlet's chain, catching him by surprise and yanking his body through the air towards Goldof.

Goldof cast aside his armor and reached out for Adlet's throat. Adlet took out his sword and swung at Goldof's hand in defense. But his hand reaching for Adlet's throat was just a feint. At the last minute Goldof pulled back his hand and dropped his body to the ground. He then aimed for Adlet's waist.

Rolonia finally got back to her feet and resumed her whip twirling. Fremy loaded another bullet into her rifle and charged at him. She was trying to get into pointblank range. And Adlet crashed to the ground face up, but managed to roll with the momentum and pull out some poison darts.

Goldof distanced himself from Adlet while dodging the poison darts. Then all of a sudden he took a giant leap backwards. In his hand he was gripping a nail 20 centimeters in length.

"Ooaaaaa!" Goldof screamed and threw the weapon he'd taken from Adlet. His aim was right at the height of the concealment Kyoma just near him.

The weapon was called the Nail of the Saints. It was one of the four trump cards that Atro Spyker had entrusted to Adlet. It could definitively in one single strike, in one single moment, kill the concealment Kyoma. And Adlet was the only person who had such a weapon.

Goldof hadn't made a move against the Kyoma not because he was petrified with fear, but because he had been waiting. He had been waiting for Adlet to come with the Nail of the Saints, the only thing that could save Nashetania.

"Ga, Gagagiya, Gyagaa."

The nail stabbed into the Kyoma and it immediately started to squirm and convulse in agony. But without missing a beat, Goldof rushed towards the Kyoma, ignoring Rolonia's whip and Fremy's bullets as they grazed him.

Fremy and Rolonia seemed confused by Goldof's actions. They looked over to where the Kyoma's screams were coming from, but for them it just looked like Goldof had suddenly launched an all-out attack at nothing but air.

"What are you doing?" Fremy asked just as she fired her rifle.



Goldof twisted his body to dodge the bullet, but it still dug into his cheek, ripping off of a chunk of his skin.

"Wait Goldof you filthy traitor. Your blood hasn't sprayed all over the place yet," Rolonia said as her whip cut through the air.

"Princess," Goldof shouted and stuck his hand into the Kyoma's mouth.

His hand grabbed hold of Nashetania's shoulder and his heart filled with joy. As he processed the fact that he's been able to accomplish his goal, Goldof pulled the Princess' body out from the Kyoma.

"Princess!" Goldof shouted again.

Once he had her in his arms, Goldof leaped far to the side, just barely dodging Rolonia's whip, Fremy's bullet, and Adlet's poison darts.

*It's too early to lose focus, he realized. I have to stop Adlet and the others. I need to make them understand that the battle is over.*

"Princess! Chamo! Hurry and save Chamo!" Goldof shouted again and again at Nashetania.

After a few moments her eyes fluttered open and she looked up at Goldof's face.

And then she smiled.

#

At the same time the fight with Hans and Dozzu was reaching its climax.

Hans' clothes had been burned by Dozzu's electric sparks and he was naked from the waist up. His entire body was red and covered in burns.

Dozzu on the other hand had a deep cut in his front legs and there was also a large gash on his face. Though they had only fought for about five minutes, they held nothing back and fought with everything they had.

However Hans was the one at a disadvantage. He had to take down Dozzu as quickly as possible so that he could go and search for Nashetania. Even though there was little time left.

Mora held Chamo's nearly dead body as she watched the two of them fight. She'd been sending all of her body's energy into Chamo. Mora knew in Chamo's current state that she would die if she stopped.

"Cat...san." Chamo said, startling Mora. *She shouldn't have the strength to speak anymore.*

"Can-san..." Chamo was smiling and strength was returning to her eyes.

"...Chamo? Can it be?"

"I will help you fight!"

Chamo opened her mouth wide and stuck her finger down her throat. Along with a copious amount of blood, she vomited out a dark liquid which took the form of a Jyuma before their eyes.

The instant Chamo shouted Dozzu moved. He turned his back on Hans and ran away as fast as his legs would carry him. Hans however did not follow him and instead moved over to Chamo's side.

"Chamo! Are you alright?"

"Cat-san! Don't worry about me! We will kill Goldof, we'll kill that small animal, we'll kill all of them!"

Chamo seemed to have recovered from her weakened state, but there was probably some damage still left over. Nevertheless, Chamo's fighting spirit, even if she were dying, couldn't be killed.

"CHAMO HAS BEEN SAVED! ADLET! CHAMO IS SAFE!" Mora shouted using her mountain echoes.

At that instant Dozzu turned as he ran. And Mora could see what looked like a smile.

#

Something happened. Adlet had been completely confused the entire time he had faced off with Goldof. Then all of a sudden the Kyoma appeared and Goldof was pulling Nashetania's body out from its mouth.

Now seeing two enemies, Adlet blindly charged forward with his attack.

Then Mora's mountain echoes reached him.

"CHAMO HAS BEEN SAVED! ADLET! CHAMO IS SAFE!"

The three Heroes all stopped at the same time.

"...It's over? Why?" Rolonia muttered.

Fremy's eyes were wide. *Did all of this mean that Nashetania and her side had surrendered? Who was the Kyoma that had been stabbed and killed by the Nail of the Saints?*

Adlet was half overjoyed and half puzzled. He couldn't make sense of what he was seeing right in front of him.

He looked at Nashetania as Goldof held her in his arms. She didn't have any armor, nor was she holding a sword. Her clothes were in tatters, her entire body was covered in injuries, and her left arm was missing from her shoulder. And at the moment it looked like she was having trouble breathing.

As he held her battered body, Goldof glared at Adlet and the others. It was as if he were saying that if they moved a single step he would kill them.

"...So you saved Chamo, huh?" Fremy asked while slowly starting to lower her rifle. Perhaps she still couldn't decide whether they should continue the fight with Goldof and Nashetania.

"That's great. We did it! We did it!" Rolonia yelped in delight with her voice returning to normal.

Fremy however looked at her and asked coldly, "Did what? What did we do?"

Rolonia couldn't answer.

"Thank you for not attacking," Goldof said. "Don't kill the Princess. She will not cause you any harm. She does not intend to fight anymore."

Adlet thought quietly about what they should do next. *Nashetania is the enemy. And so is Goldof. I might not understand the situation, but that fact hasn't changed. Perhaps it would be better if we killed them here.*

*No, that wasn't right,* Adlet thought.

"Fremy. Rolonia. Put away your weapons. Leave Nashetania and Goldof as they are."

"...Adlet, I..." Goldof began.

"I understand. You don't intend to fight anymore, right? Well then first explain what happened."

"I will tell you everything."

Fremy and Rolonia put away their weapons. Nevertheless Goldof didn't let go of Nashetania.

Though Nashetania was gasping for air, she seemed to be smiling faintly. It was a smile of victory.

"Adlet, is it really alright if we don't kill Nashetania?" Fremy asked.

Adlet didn't respond. He didn't stop the fight just to hear Goldof's story. At the moment he just didn't think there was any proof that they would be able to win even if they killed Nashetania. And though Goldof had lost his spear, was injured, and at the brink of exhaustion, it still didn't seem like Adlet could beat him.

Goldof would probably overcome any difficulty that stood in his path if it were to protect Nashetania.

"I have one thing I want to ask you Goldof. What is your objective?"

To Adlet's question Goldof replied, "...I wanted to see her again."

"Is that all?"

"That is all. I have no other objective. I couldn't think of anything other than seeing her again."

Goldof's expression had changed. No longer was it the face of the monster-like warrior that had stood in their paths. Now it was just the face of a young boy. And for the first time Adlet noticed just how much of a child Goldof still was.

A tear fell from Goldof's eyes.

"...Gol...dof." Nashetania spoke. Her voice was raspy and it looked like her throat had been crushed.

"...I was able to grant the request you made six years ago."

Nashetania smiled and Goldof lowered his head to hers.

"Princess. Truly, thank you."

From looking at the situation it was clear that Goldof had been the one who had saved her. *So why is he thanking her?*

Adlet didn't know the answer. However it was clear that whatever the reason it had nothing to do with him. It was a feeling that no one except for Goldof and Nashetania could understand.



### Epilogue

Eventually night came.

Adlet left the Lava Belt and was now on his way back to the Forest of Severed Fingers. If they remained in the Lava Belt there was a chance that they would be attacked by Tgurneu's followers. Reaching the area, Adlet found his companions in the corner of the forest sitting in wait.

After their fight, Adlet and those with him headed back to Chamo's location.

He declared a temporary cease-fire on Goldof and Nashetania so that they could get the truth out of them. And though Chamo seemed like she objected to the idea she reluctantly followed Adlet's command. Even Dozzu who had run away from the fight with Hans returned and met up with them after he found out that the fighting had stopped.

Chamo removed the Blade Gem in one of her Jyuma's stomachs then carefully checked the bodies of all her other Jyuma. As for Dozzu, he vomited out the parasite within his mouth that was feeding Tgurneu information. Then he incinerated the Kyoma on Nashetania's back which was restricting her Saint abilities.

Within the dim light emitted by the Light Gems, Adlet and the Heroes sat with Dozzu, Nashetania, and Goldof. The Six heroes were huddled together with Goldof sitting a slight distance away.

He was still holding Nashetania tightly in his arms. Dozzu sat right next to the Six Heroes and told them the truth about what had happened in the Lava Belt.

He explained the pact Cargikk, Tgurneu, and Dozzu had made. Then he told them about when he and Nashetania had been pursued by Cargikk's followers and how they opted to be captured by Tgurneu instead of killed. And then he detailed how Goldof had rescued them.

Dozzu did most of the talking. Nashetania's throat had been crushed so she was still unable to speak, and Goldof was devoting all of his energy to protecting her.

"And that's everything. I swear that's the truth. I hope that you will believe me."

Adlet and Dozzu looked at one another, but both remained quiet. There was no proof that anything Dozzu said was true. Nevertheless, it didn't seem like Dozzu had been lying.

Adlet was shocked to learn just how far he had been dancing from the truth. The Saint Instrument he had been searching for was only a tool for speaking to Nashetania. When he found clues of the remnants of the helmet's power it had just been where Goldof and Nashetania had talked. Adlet had been tricked by Tgurneu. No, he had been beaten.

"So in a nutshell the only ones who won today were the two of you and the rest of your forces, right?" Hans asked Dozzu, completely indifferent to how Adlet was taking his humiliation.

"That's correct. Our only objective was for Nashetania and myself to survive," Dozzu said in a clear voice. "We used Tgurneu to escape from Cargikk, and we used Goldof to get away from Tgurneu. It was quite the feat, as was everything all of you did as well."

"We are truly honored to receive your praise," Fremy said.

However Dozzu was not perturbed by her sarcasm.

"Hey, since the conversation is over that means it's alright to kill you all, right? Chamo can't contain herself any longer."

"...Chamo-san." Dozzu lowered his body to the ground and pressed his nose to the earth. "For so many things I would like to humbly apologize. I know my actions were unacceptable, but still I ask for your forgiveness."

"...Ummm, are you apologizing?" Taken aback by his words, Chamo leaned her head to the side.

"Chamo-san, it was not our intent to hurt you. It was just the action we had to take in order to survive," Dozzu said, and behind him Nashetania nodded.

"Shouldn't we kill you though? You are the enemy," Mora said.

Dozzu lifted his head and saw Fremy's rifle pointed at him. Keeping one arm around Nashetania, Goldof grabbed his spear and rose halfway to his feet. But Hans had his hands around his swords ready to cut Goldof down if he tried to attack.

"Everyone, please wait. Sure, we are your enemy. However at the moment we do not intend to fight with you," Dozzu said.

Adlet motioned with his hands for his companions to sit back down. Dozzu said exactly what he'd expected. If they had intended to fight then there was no reason for them to bother telling the truth.

"Dozzu-san, what are you trying to say?" Rolonia asked.

Adlet wanted to know why Rolonia had addressed him politely.

"If I kill three of the Heroes of the Six Flowers then Tgurneu and Cargikk will fall under my control. The fight within the Illusion Fog Barrier had been our way of accomplishing that. But try to understand that killing the Heroes of the Six Flowers is not our objective."

"...So what are you saying?"

"What I'm saying is that it's most likely impossible for us to kill three of the Flowers with our power.

It might be possible if we were to launch a surprise attack, but if we did that then we wouldn't be able to realize our ambitions," Dozzu said as he looked across the faces of Adlet and the other Heroes.

"We would like to defeat Tgurneu and Cargikk. They are the biggest obstacles hindering our objective. And so in order to fulfill that goal we would like to join forces with all of you."

With a twitch, Mora objected, "Don't you think you're asking a bit much? It's because of you that Chamo was almost killed."

"And for that I am truly sorry. But that was not our intention," Dozzu answered back. "We wanted to meet up with you earlier to make this proposal, however we weren't able to reach you. You all had already departed when we managed to reach the Eternal Flower. We then followed after you, but you were running about the Forest of Severed Fingers to avoid Tgurneu. So we weren't able to ascertain your whereabouts."

"If we had just stayed at the Eternal Flower a bit more..." Adlet muttered.

"That's right, Adlet-san. If that had happened then this fight would not have happened. We wouldn't have had a reason to deceive or fight you."

*If what he is saying is true, then everything that happened today was unnecessary.*

"Please, I ask that you accept my offer. It should be a beneficial proposition for both parties," Dozzu said then once again placed his head on the ground.

Everyone's gazes fell on Adlet. He was the one in charge of making the decision.

"There's no way Chamo will be satisfied with this. Adlet, can you tell Chamo that she can beat them to death?" Chamo asked from Adlet's left.

And from his right, Rolonia retorted, "But Ad-kun, our allies are increasing. That's good."

"However, Rolonia, will they really be our allies?" Mora asked.

"I would never dare to exaggerate our relationship just to get you to help us. The truth is we are your enemy. But we will just join forces in order to take down Tgurneu and Cargikk. After they are defeated we will probably fight with you as enemies once again," Dozzu replied.

"We... well, if that's the case..." Mora began.

"Regardless, I would still like to ally with you."

"What are the benefits of your proposal?" Adlet asked.

"I should be able to help you fight and so will Nashetania when her wounds are healed. In addition we would also be able to offer you information pertaining to the Wailing Demon Territory, the Kyoma, and The Majin."

"Would it be useful information?"

"It should be. You haven't even been able to find a way to cross Cargikk's valley. And on the other side of the valley there are various obstacles waiting for you. Without our cooperation it would probably be impossible for you to reach the Land of Fallen Tears."

Adlet couldn't say anything in response. Everything Dozzu was saying seemed likely.

"There is still information that I can offer. I don't know who among you is the seventh, but I do have some clues. I can assure you that the information pertains to the true identity of the seventh. And I can probably even tell you about the origin of the Impostor crest."

Adlet and the others were silent as they stared at Dozzu. There was no reason to think about it, they desperately needed the information.

Adlet looked over the faces of his companions and he could sense from their expressions that there was no one who opposed the alliance. Neither Chamo, nor even the deeply suspicious Fremy, seemed to disagree.

"Goldof," Adlet said.

Still holding Nashetania to his chest, Goldof looked up and met Adlet's gaze.

*Perhaps Goldof is a genuine flower, Adlet thought. However he also recognized the possibility that Goldof could have joined forces with Tgurneu without Nashetania or Dozzu knowing. Was such a thing truly possible? No, it was extremely unlikely that Nashetania and Goldof were separate enemies when they had such a strong bond.*

And in the end Goldof had saved Chamo and crushed Tgurneu's plans. Goldof and Tgurneu were enemies. So it didn't seem like he was the seventh.

"...What is it, Adlet?"

"Do you agree with this alliance?"

Goldof was quiet for a while, but then he spoke. "I want to protect the Princess. So if I'll be able to do that then I agree."

*He is no longer our ally, Adlet thought after hearing Goldof's words.*

"Goldof, after we defeat Tgurneu and Cargikk do you plan to fight us?"



"...I...I will protect the Princess. That is the most important thing for me. The victory of the Six Flowers comes second."

He didn't clearly say that he would fight them. But his words were the same as declaring his separation from the Heroes, despite how impossible it sounded to the other Flowers.

A traitor had appeared among the genuine Flowers.

At the moment there were eight humans. Nashetania was Dozzu's comrade and the seventh was Tgurneu's subordinate. And now Goldof had gone over to Dozzu's side.

*Adlet felt dizzy. Three among us are enemies. How are we supposed to fight in a situation like this?*

"So, Adlet-san. Will you accept an alliance?" Dozzu urged.

Adlet wanted to avoid a fight with Tgurneu and Cargikk as much as possible. The Six Flower's objective was to defeat the Majin. However Adlet needed the information Dozzu possessed.

For the time being they would join forces, but sooner or later he would end it. That was Adlet's decision. Perhaps Dozzu had only made his request after predicting how Adlet would react.

"I'm about to say that I accept, but before I do there is something that I have to ask."

"I will answer your question. Please ask away."

"You and Nashetania said that you will build a world where humans and Kyoma live in harmony. But how do you plan on accomplishing that?"

"I cannot answer that. If I do our chance of success will die."

"To me your ambitions sound like nothing more than crazy delusions. And I cannot agree to join forces with crazy companions. Tell me what you can, even if it's just one part of your plan."

Dozzu glanced at Nashetania and she gave a slight nod.

"Understood. It looks like we have no choice but to explain if we are to get your approval."

All of the Heroes focused their attention on Dozzu. Even Goldof leaned forward to hear what the Kyoma had to say.

"Our goal is to substitute the Majin."

"Substitute?"

Adlet didn't understand the meaning of the word in this context. The Majin was the Majin. It wasn't possible to switch it for something else like a king or the Head of the Temples.

"The current Majin....that ugly, insane monster...we're going to destroy it and bring forth a new Majin. The new Majin will love the Kyoma and mankind and it will have a heart that loves peace. If the new Majin doesn't have such a heart then there will be no point in replacing the current one. And under the new Majin's rule all Kyoma would be reborn. Their existence would shift from one where they hate humans to one where they can coexist with them."

"....Such a thing...I can't believe that..."

Instead of replying directly to Adlet, Dozzu continued his explanation.

"Then with the new Majin we will invade the human world. And we will destroy corrupt kings and aristocrats wallowing in sloth. We will unite the world. That is our ultimate objective. And that is all I can tell you at this time."

It was so grandiose that Adlet was at a complete loss.

"Dozzu. What do you know? Tell us. What in the world is the Majin?"

Fremy started to approach Dozzu. Her voice sounded tense. However Dozzu continued to look calmly at the Heroes.

"The Majin, The Kyoma, the Saint of the Single Flower, the crests of the Six Flowers, the opposition between Tgurneu, Cargikk, and myself, and the two fake crests. All of those things seem on the surface to be separate, but in reality they are all intricately intertwined."

The Heroes said nothing and waited for Dozzu to continue.

"I will tell you about the beginning of all of this. Three hundred years ago I encountered a single Saint. We joined forces and tried to unravel the mysteries of the world. Her name was Hayuha Pressio, the Saint of Time."

The Heroes eyes widened. There was no one alive on that continent who didn't know that name. Hayuha had defeated the Majin three hundred years ago. She was one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers.

"The crest Nashetania has now is the first of the fake crests. And originally it had been given to me three hundred years ago by the Saint of Time."

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